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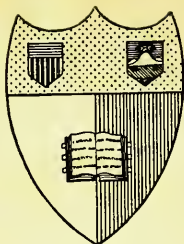
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AFTERNOON LECTURES

ON

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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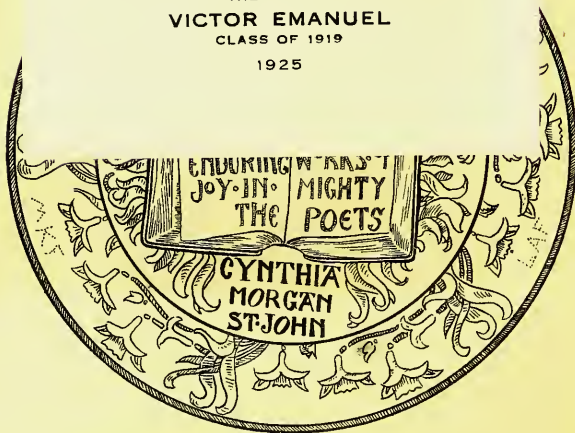
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Royal Society of Literature.

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AFTERNOON LECTURES

ON

ENGLISH LITERATURE,



Royal Society of Literature. of the  
United Kingdom & Ireland

AFTERNOON LECTURES

ON

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

*DELIVERED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL  
FROM JANUARY TO JUNE, 1893.*

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THE REV. THE MASTER OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, D.D.,  
VICE-PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

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## PREFACE.

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TOWARDS the close of last year, it was suggested to the Council of the Royal Society of Literature that, in the interests of popular education, a series of afternoon lectures on literary subjects, in addition to the ordinary evening meetings, might be advisable.

The idea was favourably received by the Council, and five lectures were subsequently delivered in the meeting room of the Society, to fairly large audiences.

The experiment will probably be repeated, and a systematic character be given to future courses of lectures.

The present volume is issued for distribution among the Fellows of the Society.

*July, 1893.*

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## THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY PERCY W. AMES,  
*Secretary R.S.L.*

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IN the *History of the Royal Society of Literature*, recently compiled by our Vice-President, Mr. E. W. Brabrook, it will be found that, at the foundation of the Society, one of the first duties of the Council was to elect ten Royal Associates, who were to be persons of distinguished learning, authors of some creditable work of literature, and men of good moral character. They were each to be recipients, by the bounty of the king, of one hundred guineas per annum, and by the regulations it was provided that every Royal Associate should on his admission choose some branch of literature, and that it should be his duty to communicate to the Council, once a year at least, a disquisition or essay on some point relative to that branch of literature chosen by him.

Many of the circumstances of these early lectures it is not possible to revive, and others it is not desirable to do so, but the present Council, animated by the same spirit and desire as our Founders, to employ all available means for the cultivation and preservation of literary taste, and the promotion of a knowledge of the best literature of our land, have instituted the present series of lectures.

The advantages to be derived from such a course are sufficiently obvious, but we may notice a few considerations which should lead us to cordially welcome, at the present time, every movement in the direction of employing pure literature as an instrument of popular education. For the last twenty years, the increasing predominance of subjects other than literary in our national education has been most marked. An active movement has been observable to deprive Letters of the prominent place they had hitherto occupied. Not only has this proposed revolution in the curricula of our schools and colleges been to a large extent accomplished, to the delight of the devotees of Natural Science, but confident predictions have been uttered that the revolution will be complete, that Art and Letters will be entirely replaced by the absorbing pursuit of the knowledge afforded in physical science.

It is much to be regretted that men, equally endowed with so many excellent qualities, having so much in common, vigorous common sense, genuine admiration for mental culture, and sincerity in their desire for rational educational systems, should, nevertheless, be so warmly opposed as are many of the special pleaders for the claims of Science and Letters respectively. It is surely better for all to admit that "the scientific method of investigation is a most valuable discipline, and that it is desirable that every one should have some experience of it," and on the other hand, it is folly to deny that "Art and Poetry and Eloquence have the capability of refreshing and delighting us, and possess

for mankind a fortifying, elevating, quickening, and suggestive power." However, for the time being the partisans of Science are popularly supposed to have the victory. Although this triumph has been over the Classics, and a great effort has been made to introduce the study of English Literature, yet the effort has admittedly been a failure, and gloomy prognostications are to be heard with reference to the future of modern literature as well as antique.

These apprehensions have been felt elsewhere in Europe. The late M. Renan asserted, that "one hundred years hence the whole of the historical and critical studies in which his life had been passed, and his reputation made, will have fallen into neglect, and that natural science will exclusively occupy man's attention." No one, familiar with the history of our literature, will for a moment accept this view. It is only by the pursuit of this study that we can rightly appreciate the history of the race. Literature is the voice of the people, and in the survival and continuity of the English tongue we can realize more fully than in the pages of the chronicler, the strength and persistence of the national spirit.

It has not, of course, always been at its best. It has suffered suppression from Danish and Norman Conquests and feudal tyranny, and has had its periods of stagnation and neglect, but it could not be finally silenced and has always revived, and with abounding life and vigour and brilliancy, has shown under ever-varying forms the same national characteristics that marked its earliest expression. It will last while the race endures, and will always remain a source of pure delight.

I believe that so long as man exists, from the very constitution of the human mind, there will always be moral and æsthetic cravings, which Science, however attractive, can never gratify. I think therefore that the "splendour and rapid march of the Physical Sciences" have partially eclipsed but will never extinguish the interest in the older subject of literature.

However, some of those whose opinions carry weight in the scholastic world have asserted that it cannot be taught, and that the experiment has failed. The signs of this failure are to be found in the modifications of certain examinational requirements, in which literature has been degraded to a secondary place, or altogether eliminated, or recognised only in connection with Philology. Mr. Churton Collins has pointed out the principal causes of this failure. "Literature has been regarded as mere material for the study of words. All that constitutes its intrinsic value has been ignored. Its masterpieces have been resolved into exercises in grammar, syntax, and etymology; its history into a barren catalogue of names and works and dates. No faculty but that of memory has been called into play in studying it." That it should have failed therefore to commend itself as an instrument of education is no more than might have been expected.

Men have written much in recent years on the subject of education, and it has been on the whole assumed that the success of these writers has at least equalled their industry. The method of modern culture has been systematized and reduced to a science. It has been freed from superstition and



bigotry, and become eminently rationalistic in spirit. Then again, all studies have been appraised and valued, and "saleable knowledge" is the most sought.

The aim and purpose of modern culture are distinctly utilitarian. No wonder the proper study of literature can find no place in the system. Indeed it is better out of it.

Mr. John Morley, in his able address at the Mansion House a few years ago, pointed out the necessity in these days for finding some effective agency for cherishing within us the Ideal, and herein is the great value of literature to all those who seek the higher education, with a genuine desire for true culture. It supplies a want, which however much the exclusively scientific may ignore, will make itself felt in the human heart. It was well said by Cardinal Newman that "the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address, and expression." We need not pause to support the truism that literature is a most valuable agent in self-culture. But we can avoid the mistake of those who confound its pursuit with education, or regard it as the sole and sufficient agent. Burke said (quoted by Morley), "What is the education of the world? Reading a parcel of books? No! Restraint and discipline, examples of virtue and of justice, these are what form the education of the world." Let us avoid all ~~extravagance~~, however, and remember that it con-

tains "the best that has been thought and said in the world," and therefore regard it as a priceless factor in self-cultivation.

The aim of the present series of lectures is not to deal with literature as a whole, nor to attempt a complete scheme of literary education. It is rather the less ambitious one of assisting the English reader in his study of "that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in Bookes," and that, to him, most interesting part of literature, in which are found the songs of his forefathers, their thoughts and wisdom, their hopes and aspirations, their humour and pathos. If it be thought, since the whole of that literature is already open to all, that teachers and guide books and lecturers are superfluous and even obstructive in the risk of encouraging the frivolous habit of talking about books and authors, instead of reading them, a very little reflection will justify their employment. We have to remember the general disinclination to enter upon such a study and the necessity for calling into activity new aspirations and longings which herein find their gratification. The difficulty of this task with those who do not read at all is greatly increased in the case of others who have formed the unwholesome habit of reading merely for reading's sake, or acquired an insatiable appetite for the curious and new.

And when this difficulty is overcome a further one is presented in the abundance of materials, a difficulty which daily increases. While some studious men are earnest advocates of systematic reading, others, like the late Lord Sherbrooke, seem to think that the best results follow when it is miscellaneous and desul-

tory, and certainly Defoe, Swift and Johnson, among others that could be named, indulged in that practice. I suppose we all admit, in a general way, that systematic reading, which we have heard advocated all our lives, is the right method, yet if we attempt to keep pace with the literature of the day our reading inevitably becomes desultory. But to read everything that comes in one's way is surely fatal to mental improvement. To eat overmuch is an offence against the body and interferes with physical health : it is a graver abuse of the mind to overload it with materials it cannot assimilate, cramping its energies, enfeebling its powers, and leaving it dwarfed and distorted. It is of the highest importance then that judgment should be exercised in dealing with the "pathless immensity" presented in literature. To know what to select and what to reject is the first great need. Then the faculty of memory, least intelligent in itself, but most essential to true intelligence, must be considered. Only such reading that leaves its mark, whose influence is retained, is adapted to permanently affect the mind. If good, it will nourish and develop : if evil, it will poison and corrupt. Therefore the masterpieces should be read again and again. Finally, time and opportunity should be taken for the exercise of reflection, that the new thoughts, the generous motives, the grand conceptions, the heroic resolves, the reverence for the true and beautiful, that which reflects the "delight and aroma of life," may all take up their abode with us and become part of our character and being. The aim of our course then, and the duty of the lecturer, are to stimulate the desire to know the brightest minds in Literature, and

to assist the cultivation of the difficult habit of reading with judgment, memory, and reflection.

Although it is proposed to confine our course to English literature, the opportunity will doubtless be seized again and again of urging the necessity of extending private reading far beyond these limits. The intelligent and earnest student will not exclude any of the masterpieces in other European or in ancient literature. The principles of true art and the highest types can only be discovered by employing the comparative method. And the numerous admirable translations now existing, bring the best within the reach of all; and great as these are, our own literature does not lose in interest and splendour, or become less precious an inheritance to us after the comparison. The student of Shakespeare is indeed better able to appreciate his superlative excellences, and at the same time to comprehend more fully the perfection of dramatic art and the laws of the human mind, by reading in this connection Æschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes, among the ancients, Tasso, Goethe and Molière, to take the names that first come to one's mind, among the moderns. And for similar purposes Dante is read with Milton, Cervantes with Fielding, Emerson with Bacon and Carlyle. But so far as concerns the present series of lectures the selection of subjects will be confined to our own literature.

There is one other limitation, which will probably be maintained, which will exclude the works of living authors, and this for the following reasons. There is greater need for lectures on the literature of the past than on that of the present. No one will hazard the

opinion that contemporary literature does not receive sufficient attention. The real danger is that the past should be neglected and forgotten. Again, truer and more impartial judgment may be expected on authors and their works belonging to periods which lie beyond the influence of the interests and passions of our own time. In these days when differences of opinion are so prevalent, it is difficult for even the calmest and most judicious mind to judge disinterestedly of the opinions and doings of contemporaries, and so the study of the literature of the past is a discipline in candour, tolerance, and impartiality of judgment.

Principal Caird, Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow University, in speaking of the study of History, says what is equally applicable to literature:—"Time takes little account of conventional greatness; it consigns to oblivion whole hosts of those who possessed only arbitrary claims to honour, and confers immortality on many who, in their own day, were obscure or little noted." Moreover, self-advertisement is so characteristic of the present day, success seems so dependent upon getting talked about and keeping constantly in the public eye, that it is difficult to distinguish among contemporary literature what is transient from what is lasting.

Again, fiction practically constitutes the literature of to-day, and novelists and dramatists are now referred to different camps, and it is said that the nineteenth century is about to close in a battle all along the line between the Romancists and the Realists. I do not propose to express an opinion and only refer to the matter to illustrate some of the obstacles

to the formation of final literary judgments upon living writers. The very definite antagonism existing is shown by their own writings. Robert Louis Stevenson, the first, probably, of English Romancists, while writing on this subject, introduces the following cutting passage:—"Hence," he says, "when we read the English Realists, the incredulous wonder with which we observe the hero's constancy under the submerging tide of dulness, and how he bears up with his jibbing sweetheart and endures the chatter of idiot girls, and stands by his whole unfeatured wilderness instead of seeking relief in drink or foreign travel. Hence, in the French, in that meat market of middle-aged sensuality, the disgusted surprise with which we see the hero drift sidelong, and practically quite untempted, into every description of misconduct and dishonour. In each we miss the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennoble what is base; in each, life falls dead like dough, instead of soaring away like a balloon into the colours of the sunset; each is inconceivable, for no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm phantasmagoric chamber of his brain with the painted windows and the storied walls."

When M. Zola and his friends see the phrase, "that meat market of middle-aged sensuality," we may be sure there is no immediate prospect of a cessation of hostilities. On the other hand it is believed by certain critics that if the Realists would but "degrade that everlasting problem which they have quite unnecessarily included in their impedi-



menta, as to how much or how little should be said in print about the relations between the sexes, to a second place, and photograph life simply as it appears to them with its imperfections, its miseries, and its *ennui*," they would have the unequivocal support of all those who seriously wish to ameliorate the social and material conditions of life. The ideal realist therefore would appear to have a mission in our rapidly democratised society. But however that may be, it is, I think, clear that no judgment commanding general acceptance, upon present day literature, can be looked for in our own time.

Lastly, I am disposed to think that the books best worth reading belong to the literature of past ages. Relating to all the most general experiences of the human spirit, the virtues, the vices, the elemental passions, the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, love and sympathy, the best thoughts have already been crystallised in the choicest language. We are accustomed in other branches of art to look to the past for the most perfect models of external grace, and a similar expectant search in literature is correspondingly rewarded. If we consider the one question of form we discover among the immortal books of writers dead long ago the finest perception of the various capacities of our language and the utmost skill in its idiomatic employment; opulence of diction combined with the most exquisite arrangement of words making the prose often musical like the melody of measured verse. And if we take the history of ideals we shall find that the summit of modern mind has not anything

to surpass the highest revelations of mind in the past, which still constitute the durable propositions of the creeds of higher and more civilized humanity. As revelations of existence and expressions of higher manhood they are almost unapproachable.

I am, of course, now referring to the past in its widest sense, and including Teutonic literature, but no proposition is likely to find general acceptance which exalts the past above the present; and indeed it entirely depends upon our point of view and standard of comparison. When we think of the practical and utilitarian achievements of the modern nations of Europe, of the extraordinary developments in all the physical sciences and manufactures, the result of endless discovery and invention, all of which tend to ameliorate and add pleasure to the conditions of life, and to humanise it accordingly, and still more when we contemplate the more equable administration of justice, the larger arena for intellect and character, the wider distribution of wealth, the noble extension of liberty and equality, all directly the outcome of the quickened sense of public justice in all civilized nations, we have good reason to be satisfied with modern progress, for in all these respects the present is an advance upon the past. Nevertheless, if we confine our examination to our present subject of enquiry and make purely idealistic comparisons, we shall find examples of the ancient development of idea, which are both higher in tone and more exquisitely sensitive and delicate in outline and finish, though less cosmopolitan in practical tendencies.

If any one object that the operation of the



law of evolution necessarily involves the inferiority of the earlier to the later manifestations of mind in historic times, let him but recall the sublime efforts of the ancient Greeks in architecture, in sculpture, in poetry, and in philosophy. Such an objector has much yet to learn of the application of the doctrine of evolution to the phenomena of mind. These truths, for example, that man as at present constituted is typically a being with limits of potentiality, and that the progress of his mental development within these limits is not in direct and unbroken correspondence with the course of time. The progress of the human mind is more comparable to the advancing and receding waves of the incoming tide. The height attained by any single wave depends upon proximate causes and local circumstances not necessarily affecting the rest, but the advance of the entire tide results from a profounder cause whose influence all feel and obey. And so advancing knowledge and idea become diffused among the people and irresistibly raise the general standard of intelligence and develop what we may term the progress of the species. But this progress is not, to change the simile, like an unbroken rising ground, unvaried in its ascent. It is delightfully featured and relieved by those "flowers of the race, the true sons of genius," upon whose memory we love to dwell when contemplating the progress of humanity; but these great men, the chosen masters of the intellectual world, o'ertop the moderns as much as the ancients.

I do not wish to be understood as saying that the mind of man, having already reached so high a

point, cannot be expected to do so again, nor do I wish to assert that some of the living writers, who delight us so much, may not in the judgment of posterity be placed in that select company; but no unanimity of opinion can be looked for in their own day, and I think it is wiser to avoid any approach to invidious comparisons.

Now after eliminating from our course foreign and contemporary literature, we next pass to the consideration as to the best way in which the study can be promoted in that vast library furnished by our own forefathers, and this leads us to examine the mutual relations of lecturer and student, and what may be expected of each. Let us deal with the latter first, and the problem has at once to be faced, as to *what to read*? It is a favourite but not altogether a satisfactory answer to this question to give a list of one hundred books. However interesting these lists may be as a topic of discussion, and useful as types of rational reading, it is too mechanical a device to be regarded as a plan of education for all. The problem is not capable of so simple a solution. While none but a pedant believes that reading can suffice for a man's education, it should, nevertheless, follow the same lines and leave no part of our nature and character untouched.

Mr. Frederic Harrison, the assistance of whose suggestive work on the *Choice of Books* I desire to acknowledge and to recommend at the same time, eloquently pleads for the habit of "reading with a purpose," and for "reading the best." There can be no doubt that many whose reading is but a "refined

idleness," would associate with the idea of reading with a purpose an uncomfortable impression of tediousness and effort, and they turn away from the greatest and best. They have never come under the gracious influence of the poets and the true realism, whose mission is to find out "where joy resides and to give it a voice far beyond singing." They have not experienced, as Matthew Arnold expresses it, "the security one enjoys with truly classic work, the fulness of pleasure, the cordial satisfaction." It is as curious as regrettable that there should be any disinclination to partake of so rich a feast, but it is probable that it indicates an undeveloped quite as much as a vitiated taste.

Then we have to consider the busy classes, whose members of necessity read for purposes of recreation and not of study, and who naturally prefer the authors who possess the gift of sending the anxious, weary and worried man of affairs off to sleep in a tolerably hopeful and comfortable frame of mind. The philosophy of such soothing writers styled Lullabists by the ingenious author of *Present day Literary Portents*, is that honest labour, honest love, goodness, virtue, genuine merit of all kinds not only deserve success, but in nine cases out of ten command it. "For the refined and delicate of fibre," says this writer, "Scott and Tennyson are the favourite lullabists, for others, the *escape* from the troubles of life is a good laugh. Hence the growth of professedly comic papers, the shoals of parodists and punsters, burlesquists and society clowns, the hurly-burly of humorists, old and new, who en-

deavour, not always with perfect success, to keep British sides shaking from Land's End to Cape Wrath by making faces at seriousness."

No sensible man thinks that all reading should be serious; light reading is one of the most delightful restoratives, and in our climate and latitude, in which so much time has to be spent indoors, one of the most convenient also. It is only necessary to urge that the scope of such reading should be extended, that for this innocent purpose we need not exclusively employ what is inferior or trivial. Equally efficient, indeed far more so, will be found those gems of literary art which play upon the imagination, gently stir the feeling and touch the heart. We need to break free from "that monstrous custom" which would absorb our brief leisure in impelling us to devour early copies and new print, and to cultivate and refine our taste so to value the pearls of great price, those "thoughts in blossom," the poetic writings of our literature.

Poetry, which realises Shelley's description as "the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds," is surely fitted to relieve the tired brain with its refreshing fragrance. And those who have or acquire appreciation of the spontaneous irrepressible music of lyrical poetry have an inexhaustible resource in Milton, Shakespeare, Shelley, Herrick, Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson, and other masters of the "language of the gods." If any ask, how may these be inexhaustible? he cannot surely have felt the touch of their inspiration. Remember Coleridge's critical aphorism on the test of true poetry, "that not the poem which

we have read, but that to which we return with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power and claims the name of essential poetry"; and what Keats has said on the all-pervading influence of Beauty :—

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ;  
Its loveliness increases ; it will never  
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing ;  
Therefore on every morrow are we wreathing  
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,  
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth  
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,  
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways  
Made for our searching ! Yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,  
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon  
For simple sheep ; and such are daffodils,  
With the green world they live in ; and clear rills  
That for themselves a cooling covert make  
'Gainst the hot season ; the mid-forest brake,  
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms ;  
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms  
We have imagined for the mighty dead ;  
All lovely tales that we have heard or read ;  
An endless fountain of immortal drink,  
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.”

But those who are gifted with greater leisure and the serious purpose of self-culture, will find satisfaction only in the more systematic and comprehensive study of our literature, historically and critically, and will trace the growth and development to the fulness of perfection in all its departments.

In dramatic poetry such a student will not only familiarise himself with the masterpieces of Shakespeare, but will read Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*, the earliest in the series of tragedies, and in which the first application of blank verse to dramatic composition is found, a species of versification which experience has shown to be best adapted to them, and the other predecessors of Shakespeare, Edwards, Lillie, Peele, Greene, Nash, and Christopher Marlowe. These all show, in different degree, a certain richness of idea and command of language. Henry Mackenzie in *Essays on the Old Drama*, says, "If we seek for a poetical image, a burst of passion, a beautiful sentiment, a trait of nature, we seek not in vain in the works of our oldest dramatists." Campbell regards the *Absalom* of Peele as the "earliest fountain of pathos and harmony that can be traced in our dramatic poetry." Hallam speaks of Greene's "easy and spirited versification, reminding us of Shakespeare," and all know "Marlowe's mighty line."

The student will not neglect, like so many do, "Rare Ben Jonson," supreme among "literary giants of energy and invention." Mr. Swinburne has pointed out the defect in Jonson's genius, which I think sufficiently explains why he is not so great a favourite with the general reader. He says, "the flowers of his growing have every quality but one, which belongs to the rarest and finest among flowers; they have colour, form, variety, fertility, vigour; the one thing they want is fragrance." And again, "the singing power which answers in verse to the odour of a blossom, to the colouring of a picture, to the flavour



of a fruit, that quality without which they may be good, commendable, admirable, but cannot be delightful, was not a natural gift of this great writer." Then the imagery, wit and humour of Beaumont and Fletcher, the grace and dignity of Massinger, will further enrich the study and reward the student.

Again the critical examination of prose literature is an excellent discipline. Dr. Angus has pointed out a delusion which seems to be prevalent, that the creative faculty is not to be expected in prose literature. While the poet is called the Maker, and endowed in the popular imagination with the divine gift of the creation of ideas, the important truth is lost sight of, that the greatest prose writers employ, no less than the poets, imaginativeness, skill in perceiving and describing analogies, and in their writings are to be found the "exquisite beauty of words set in perfect shape, as the beautiful dress of noble thought."

The historical study of prose makes us familiar with Sir John Mandeville, the first writer of new English prose, with Reginald Pecock, the first theologian who wrote in English, and with Sir Thomas More, one of the noblest and best of men and purest of writers who wrote the first history in English.

The study of style in prose is full of object lessons of the false and the true. We see examples of "low-creeping matter clothed with high-flown language"; of writers so false in style that we are reminded of Talleyrand's cynical observation that "language was given to man to conceal his thoughts." Others who think chiefly of style, far less of idea, who subordinate

truth to antithesis and sacrifice character and reputation to a telling phrase or epigram; still others whose pompous and ponderous rhythm justify the application to them of Macaulay's remarks on Dr. Johnson, "as soon as he took his pen in his hand to write for the public, his style became systematically vicious. All his books are written in a learned language which nobody hears from his mother or his nurse, in a language in which nobody ever quarrels, or drives bargains, or makes love, in a language in which nobody ever thinks."

In delightful contrast with all this is the writing of those whose characteristic is perfect sincerity, who illustrate the maxim that the "basis of all excellence is truth," whose sentences are clear as "mountain water flowing over a rock," simple, manly, and straightforward. For directness and simplicity, and power of always making himself understood, no writer can surpass Swift. In the familiar and colloquial style with a wealth of language and extreme realism, probably Defoe is the most remarkable. And in saying precisely what he meant to say no writer has succeeded better than Bunyan. While for perfect ease combined with refined elegance, few surpass Sidney and Addison. The latter's style, Lord Lytton says, "has that nameless urbanity in which we recognise the perfection of manner; courteous, but not courtier-like; so dignified, yet so kindly; so easy, yet high-bred; it is the most perfect form of English." Dr. Morell's observations on the construction of sentences are, I think, worth quoting: "The tendency of prose has been always towards shorter and more compact sentences. In the fourteenth cen-



tury, for example, Sir John Mandeville hardly knows when to end his sentences, some of which overflow the page, and his notion of organising a sentence is extremely weak and vague. On the other hand, the sentences of Macaulay, in the nineteenth century, are short, compact, and highly organized. Defoe's sentences are long and clumsy; Charles Lamb's are infinitely sweet and pleasant to hear; and perhaps Thackeray's are the most genuinely attractive and easy to read." And then our late Fellow compares the fourteenth century prose to the heavy springless broad-wheeled wagon, and that of the nineteenth to the light hung and graceful carriage. Nevertheless the grandest prose style of all belongs to the seventeenth century in the pages of Milton, and it requires Macaulay's pen to do it justice. "The prose works of Milton deserve," he says, "the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages, compared with which the finest descriptions of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold; not even in the *Paradise Lost* has the great poet ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works, in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies."

Closely allied to this subject of enquiry is the study of language itself in literature. Only by this means can we obtain an adequate conception of the true value of expression, which alone gives immortality to thought. We observe the circumstances

and the laws of its steady and continuous growth, as well as of those comparatively sudden augmentations due to special causes, as the national awakening in the time of Edward the Third, the great revival of letters, the invention of printing, the Reformation, &c., or to individual writers who greatly enriched our vocabulary, like Chaucer, Mandeville, Langlande, Caxton, Bacon, and Shakespeare, and to the influence of translations, all contributing affluence, vigour, clearness and polish to the medium in which the people, similarly growing in knowledge, sensibility, and power, found utterance for their feeling and their thought.

Finally, we must remember that English literature, rightly understood, includes also scientific works that are more than mere text books. Many of these, indeed, excite emotions of wonder and delight, and show a distinct connection with what is beautiful and morally excellent; others disclose grand conceptions and noble interpretations of Nature's methods and phenomena, and no earnest student will regret a determination to explore a body of literature which includes the masterpieces of the great and admirable Darwin.

Turning again to the general reader, who requires the time or opportunity, or perhaps the inclination for systematic study, and is yet urged to read the best, how may he know the best?

The most reliable criteria of what is most wholesome and excellent are found in those subjective experiences, those subtle, varied and indefinable influences, by which we gauge the worth, moral and intellectual, of the men we associate with, as well as

of the books we read. Those writings surely are the best companions which show us the hidden beauty of things, which reveal the deeper meaning of life, which give us a healthier and a happier interest in our fellow men, our work, and our surroundings.

Those who prefer the assistance which the well-expressed opinion of a competent critic gives, will find the characters of a "classic," well estimated in the definition of Saint-Beuve: "An author who has enriched the human mind, who has really added to its treasure, who has got it to take a step farther; who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or penetrated to some eternal passion, in that heart of man where it seemed as though all were known and explored; who has produced his thought, or his observation, or his invention, under some form, no matter what, so it be great, large, acute, and reasonable, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, yet a style that finds itself the style of everybody, in a style that is at once new and antique, and is the contemporary of all the ages."

We pass now to the consideration of the particular ways in which the lecturer on literature may afford the most useful help. Obviously the competent lecturer has knowledge, sympathy, and power of expression. Knowledge not only of the external facts, the phenomena of literary history, but of the laws to which they may be referred, and not only sympathy with beautiful sentiment, but that trained and cultured sensibility, which gives the finest feeling for appropriate expression and perfect harmony. And in respect of power of expression he should, as

Matthew Arnold puts it, "have the merit of so touching men and works of which the general reader knows, and can be expected to know very little, as to make them cease to be mere names, as to give a real sense of their power and charm."

The lecturer will show how the slowness of German thought and the quickness of Celtic thought have combined to make the national character which is reflected in our literature.

The exponent of a period will not only give a clear exposition of its distinguishing characters and general environment, but will illustrate the continuity of our literary history by tracing the antecedent conditions of which it is the outcome, as well as its own effects and influences.

The interpreter of poetry must be familiar with the brightest minds, with Chaucer and Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. He must know the fascination of "pure and flawless workmanship," of clear-cut crystalline speech. He must be in sympathy with genius in its most unrestrained and wildest moods, and show as the Rev. James Byrne has done in the case of Robert Burns, how the very spirits of love, of lust, of friendship, of independence, of drunkenness, of religious adoration, of universal sympathy, are all invoked in turns by the mighty magician in all their life and power, bringing with them "airs from Heaven or blasts from Hell."

Again he will guide the student to the appreciation of Wordsworth, that fount of inspiration, whereby he may obtain glorious visions of beauty in the face of Nature, and hear the sweet music of her voice, whispering all of best and purest and

tenderest that has ever passed within him. He will show how Tennyson and Spenser are alike in truthfulness of detail, love of allegory, beauty of sentiment and expression and exquisite choice of words.

In the plays of Shakespeare, as John Beattie Crozier has brilliantly suggested, he will conduct the student through the dazzling lustre of the writing, the rich and resplendent imagery, and teach him to appreciate, "beneath that magnificence of expression and wealth of metaphor, more striking signs of the poet's genius in his immense and subtle knowledge of the laws of the human heart down to its finest and most evanescent experiences, which enabled Shakespeare to follow, with the fatal sureness of a hound following the trail, the winding, ever-fluctuating and evanishing line of thought and passion."

Again he will show the student that he enters upon a new world when he begins the study of literature, a higher world of thought and idea, wherein we are enabled to realize the identity of nature and essential likeness of men. Great indeed are the inequalities in degree, in power and insight, and those who excel in these respects are here held in their true estimation and are justly regarded as the real glory of the nation, but all the superficial differences of the material world, which foster the delusion that men are of different natures, fade away before the grand moral and spiritual identity which is so clearly seen in the World of Idea. In the republic of letters, kings cast aside the royal mantle and the large-hearted Alfred labours side by side with the monk

of St. David's. How completely people are blinded to real merit in their own time and how disproportionate are their estimates of their contemporaries are seen in the history of every age. In the World of Letters things are seen in their due proportion, and real merit ultimately determines success.

Another curiously interesting point noticeable is the frequency with which we meet with instances of genius that could only blossom apparently away from the ordinary discipline of scholastic training, which seemed either not adapted to its development or not required for it. The examples are numerous of poets, scholars, men like Gibbon, Swift, Dryden, Walter Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, who have no academic distinction recorded in their biographies. Although these are exceptional cases yet they also convey a lesson and teach us to distinguish, more accurately, innate genius from learning, the man himself from his acquirements.

I desire now to say a word about the present series of lectures. The gentlemen who will address you on subsequent occasions have selected interesting subjects, which are, however, independent of each other. The time at disposal after the resolution was taken was not sufficient to organise a systematic course arranged according to a definite plan of connected subjects, successive epochs or schools of writers. It is wholly miscellaneous in character, but it need not be less interesting or instructive on that account. A brief reference to some of the promised lectures will perhaps here be admissible. Mr. R. B. Holt will discourse upon "Miracle Plays," that curious and striking employment of the dramatic instinct in man



to bring the legends of the saints home to the hearts of the illiterate. It is a subject fruitful in ideas and full of interest, as lying not only at the foundation of our general literature, but affording materials for the enquiry as to how far they may be regarded as constituting the origin of dramatic representation. Then Mr. E. W. Brabrook has promised a lecture on the Literary treatment of History. A noble subject, scarce any more inspiring. A few weeks ago a master mind in science was taken from us,\* one who, like the Hebrew prophet, gazed upon the dry bones until, to his trained imagination, they became clothed with flesh, and the long extinct creatures stood pictured before us as in life. So in late years the scattered records of dead and forgotten ages have so ingeniously been pieced together that the Past, like some fossil mammal, stands reconstructed before us. Not only "the great panorama of events, moving in vast perspective and outline along the ages," but the very life of the people has been vividly portrayed. Our excellent Vice-President is well qualified to deal with so grand a topic. Dr. Douglas Lithgow will lecture on the Influence of the Lake Poets upon Literature, when we may hope to enjoy the refreshing grace and charm of poetry, and seek to behold with him the "bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies." Dr. Knighton, who recently in an admirable discourse on Greek and Latin Wit, added one more to the series of papers which stand over his name in our Transactions, will lecture on Gog and Magog. However interesting these lectures may be, their real object will only be attained

\* Sir Richard Owen, Hon. F.R.S.L.

if those who attend them are induced to make a personal acquaintance with the subjects treated.

But enough perhaps has been said upon the disciplinary and educative character of the study of literature. It contains other sources of interest; it brings to our knowledge many whom it is a delight to know. While some excite our reverent admiration, and some afford endless entertainment, there are others who call forth deeper feelings, by the loveliness of their character. The noble-minded, in whom pride and vanity, resentment and self-love have no place, who in pure simplicity and singleness of heart give their great knowledge and power unreservedly to the world, solely that all may share their own happiness; men whose lives seem realised ideals of what is most excellent in moral beauty. As Kingsley said, "the *doctrines* which they held are a matter not for us, but for God and their own souls. The *deeds* which they did are matter for us and for all England." And what a grand company they make, singled out from all the ages, from Baeda at Jarrow 1,200 years ago, to Charles Darwin at Downe village, in our own time, all now gracing "England's Pantheon of beneficent and healthy manhood."

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## THE LITERARY TREATMENT OF HISTORY.

BY EDWARD BRABROOK, V.P.R.S.L.

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IN the lecture by Mr. Ames, to which we listened with so much delight and profit last month, he told us that the present series of discourses is in some sense a continuation of the original plan this Society had in view when, just seventy years ago; it appointed its ten Royal Associates. These distinguished men were each asked to select some branch of literature and to communicate to the Society at least once in every year a disquisition or essay on some point relative to that branch of literature, becoming in effect a Professor of that subject on the foundation of the Society. When I too rashly accepted the flattering invitation of the Council to share in this revival, glancing down the list of Royal Associates, I found that William Roscoe, the author of the *Life of Lorenzo de Medici*, had selected for his province "Literary History," and that suggested the present topic.

I do not find that that great man ever fulfilled his undertaking to read an annual paper on literary history; and I am therefore relieved from the fear of placing myself in competition with him when I stand in his place and take as the subject of my discourse the Literary Treatment of History. In dealing with

it I do not propose to go back any length of time. Mr. Ames laid down for us the limits of our scope, and mentioned incidentally that Sir Thomas More might be regarded as our first English historian, Baeda and the old chroniclers being left out of the question. I pause for a moment, however, on Bacon's historical works: his *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, his *Queen Elizabeth*, and his beginning of the *History of Great Britain*, a fragment which, as the editor shrewdly puts it, "seems to have been written to oblige the King to whom it was presented."

Mr. Lecky, in an admirable presidential address, delivered before the Birmingham and Midland Institute in October last, remarks that

"In its earlier stages history was regarded chiefly as a form of poetry recording the more dramatic actions of kings, warriors, and statesmen. Homer and the early ballads are indeed the first historians of their countries, and long after Homer, one of the most illustrious of the critics of antiquity described history as merely poetry free from the incumbrance of verse. The portraits that adorned it gave some insight into human character; it breathed noble sentiments, rewarded and stimulated noble actions, and kindled by its strong appeals to the imagination high patriotic feeling; but its end was rather to point than to guide, to consecrate a noble past than to furnish a key for the future; and the artist in selecting his facts looked mainly for those which could throw the richest colour upon his canvas."

This witness is true.

We all feel instinctively that history demands and deserves a certain dignity of treatment; that events which shape the destiny of nations and alter the course of men's lives for generations should be des-

cribed with a certain rhythmical and stately march of expression corresponding to the march of the incidents that are recorded.

A comic history of England, however skilfully the jests may be contrived, not only wearies one by its endless trifling and laboured facetiousness, but strikes one as a sort of sacrilege, belittling and travestying events that, if not great in themselves, were productive of great results and deserve a certain grandeur of treatment. When even the pencil of a Leech is employed to represent Cæsar or Alfred or Cromwell or other great heroes of our history in an undignified attitude, we feel that the artist has a theme which is not worthy of him, and that no real fun is to be found in his work.

To say that John signed Magna Charta because it was a *signe quâ non* that he should do so; that some people call it Carta, because a broad-wheeled wagon has been frequently driven through it; that the battle of Crecy, being fought in a shower of rain, ought to be called the battle of Water Cressy; that the War of the Roses planted many thorns in the bosom of fair England; that the Court of Star Chamber was so called because justice was administered in it in a twinkling; that Cardinal Fôle, for so I must pronounce it, was noted for standing erect; that James I was not a jem remarkable for brilliancy; that the Fire of London gave the inhabitants several "nichts wi' Burns"; and so forth, is not only to make a number of execrably bad puns, but to offend the taste of mankind, who think that the events and individuals which go to form history deserve more sober treatment.

Bacon, in the fragments of history that he wrote, has not forgotten the dignity of the subject. Take the concluding words of his *History of Henry VII*:

“He was born at Pembroke Castle, and lieth buried at Westminster, in one of the stateliest and daintiest monuments of Europe, both for the chapel and for the sepulchre, so that he dwelleth more richly dead in the monument of his tomb than he did alive in Richmond, or any of his palaces. I could wish he did the like in this monument of his fame.”

In the dedication to Charles, Prince of Wales, he makes this shrewd comment on the subject of his biography:

“He was a wise man and an excellent king; and yet the times were rough, and full of mutations and rare accidents. And it is with times as it is with ways; some are more uphill and downhill, and some are more flat and plain, and the one is better for the liver, and the other for the writer.”

Of the Star Chamber he says: “This Court is one of the sagest and noblest institutions of this kingdom.” His historical style is that of the individualist; for both in the time when he wrote and the time he wrote about the King in person had very much to do with the course of events, and it was Bacon’s courtly policy to assume that the King did everything. Yet he asks his readers to take in good part his long insisting upon the laws which were made, for he says:

“In my judgment it is some defect, even in the best writers of history, that they do not often enough summarily deliver and set down the most memorable laws that passed in the times whereof they writ, being indeed the principal acts of peace. For though they may be had in original books of law

themselves ; yet that informeth not the judgment of kings and counsellors and persons of estate, so well as to see them described and entered in the table and portrait of the times."

Mr. Lecky, speaking of those vast revolutions, for good or for evil, which seem to have transformed the character or permanently changed the fortunes of nations, either by a sudden and violent shock, or by the slow process of gradual renovation, remarks that you will find in this country two great opposite exaggerations. There is a school of writers, he says, of which Buckle is an admirable representative, who are so struck by the long chain of causes, extending over many centuries, that preceded and prepared revolutions, that they teach a kind of historic fatalism, reducing almost to nothing the action of individualities ; and there is another school, which is specially represented by Carlyle, who reduce all history into biographies, into the action of a few great men upon their kind. His own view is, though there is a certain steady and orderly evolution that it is impossible in the long run to resist, yet individual action, and even mere accident, have borne a very great part in modifying the direction of history.

This is a point of some importance in considering the literary treatment of history, for it is obvious that that treatment will be very different, as history is approached from the point of view of individual biography, or from that of the slow evolution of causes acting upon great masses of the people. Both the moral purpose and the æsthetic treatment of the topic will differ, as the historian proposes either to depict to us some character standing aloof

and apart from the rest of mankind, above them in its aims and in the power it exercises over others, or as the creature of second causes. In the one case, he seeks to stir merely our admiration or our horror, as the grandeur of the individual has been beneficent or the reverse ; in the other, he claims our study for the patient consideration of the causes which lead to the evolution of events, and work upon all classes alike.

Mr Lecky treats both as exaggerations, and offers a tempting *via media*, but the *via media* itself may tend to exaggeration, and be pushed too far : if ninety-nine is the real value, then an estimate of fifty departs further from it than an exaggeration to one hundred, and the mean value is not true. If the law of evolution is a general law, then the circumstance that once in a hundred times it may be found not to apply, does not warrant the conclusion that equal weight is to be given to the theory of individual action, but only that some weight is to be given to it. All human reasoning is but an approximation to truth from a balance of probabilities, and if we find that events occur from a given cause seventy-six times out of a hundred, it is nearer the truth to say that they always occur from that cause, than to attach an equal weight to another.

Mr. Lecky also describes the evolutionist theory as historic fatalism ; but I venture to submit that that is an inaccurate, or at least a narrow, view of the theory, which does not leave out of account the human element in mundane affairs, but deals with it in the bulk, and not in detail. In this connection, I will take leave to quote from a book, which we do not consult so faithfully as did our fathers, but which



still contains for us as for them much sound philosophy for guidance in life as well as the basis of all our religious belief—I mean the Bible. At the solemn time when our Lord awaited His betrayer, He said, “The Son of Man goeth as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed”—an utterance that combines the historic fatalism of which Mr. Lecky complains with the fullest recognition of the personal responsibility of man.

Take, for example, the effect on history of the career of a man to whom alone among historians Mr. Lecky himself has done justice—John Wesley, the prime mover in the religious revival of the eighteenth century, a man whose personal influence and actions have had the largest effect upon thousands of others. Figure to ourselves this little man, with his keen eyes, his flowing brown hair, his neat clerical attire, his tireless energy, his contagious enthusiasm, his plain straightforward manner of speech, and that nameless something about him which showed to everyone that he was every inch a gentleman. Where is a stronger personality? Yet who will doubt that he was the creature of an unexpressed but felt want of the times—that if he had never lived, or never left Georgia, there would still have been a reaction against the calm scepticism and moral congelation of the country, which would have found other hands to hold its plough, other voices to proclaim it?

Figure to ourselves also another little man in our own century, whose corporal's riding coat and cocked hat and stern repression of all emotion and boundless ambition, as well as his ruthless cruelty and apparent absence of any moral sense, mark him out as the very



reverse in every respect of John Wesley—I mean, of course, Napoleon the First, a man whom everyone would quote as the very type of one whose individual character and force of will made events bow before him and worked out his own intentions in defiance of right, in defiance almost of the laws of God and of Nature. How he swept over the face of Europe like a destroying pestilence, with a very cloud of armed men, subverting thrones and setting up in the place of their occupants his own relatives and soldiers, till nearly the whole continent is brought in a sense under his rule as of an absolute autocrat!

Yet who will doubt who looks at the condition of Europe during the years which preceded the invasions of Napoleon, that the state of things which it was his mission to subvert was already tottering to its fall, and that the like events would have happened in the long run, even without him? The form the events took and the cruel accompaniments of his career owe much no doubt to his personal character; but master of armies though he was, there was nothing in what he did that was not called for by the spirit of the times, and in that sense was as was determined. This is not fatalism; for the woe pronounced against the man who betrayed took effect just as much on Judas as if the event of the betrayal had not been certain in despite of him; and in like manner the moral responsibility of Napoleon for his own actions is independent of the event.

Take yet another instance of a man whom we are accustomed to look upon as the very type of masterful personality, who had so much his own way that what he said and thought was said and thought by

his Parliaments, and even by the Courts of Law of the country—Henry VIII. The familiar view of the events of the Reformation is that he wanted to divorce Catharine of Aragon in order that he might marry Anne Boleyn, and that as the Pope would not declare that his marriage with Catharine was illegal, and the dispensation for it invalid, he declared himself of Protestant faith. As we are told by Gray,

“Gospel light first dawned from Boleyn’s eyes;”

and in consequence we have had Henry’s personal character discussed by historians with heat corresponding to that always evolved by theological discussion; your Lingards painting him as the worst of men, while Mr. Froude and others describe him as the best.

Perhaps the most ingenious defence of Henry the Eighth is that put forward by my friend Mr. Luke Owen Pike in his admirable *History of Crime*—that the monarch had so rooted a horror of the crime of adultery that he was impelled by it to the strange courses of action he adopted. Whenever he found his mind turning toward a lady other than his wife for the time being, he would not entertain the possibility of being unfaithful to that wife, and therefore first of all sought a reason, good or bad, for depriving her of the status of wife, either by death or divorce. I do not know whether this view places his personal character in a much more amiable light than the view generally accepted, but it certainly has the advantage of attributing to him the virtue of consistency, and leads us to wonder how long he could have kept up that course of action.

Even in this case, however, we shall find upon enquiry that other events had much more to do with the dissolution of the monasteries and the progress of the Reformation than the personal character of Henry the Eighth had, and that in these is no exception to the rule that things happen as determined. There is a most instructive fact shown by the Rev. Mr. Loftie in his *History of London*—that by this time the whole of the ground around the cities of London and Westminster, east, north, south, and west, as well as a considerable portion of the latter city itself, had become Church property. A state of things in which the dead hand of the Church was at the throat of the commerce of London, stopping the expansion of the City on every hand, is quite sufficient, by the operation of natural laws alone, to cause a reaction sufficiently explosive to upset the religion of the country.

If it were possible to treat the question as one of facts in natural history, I should gladly proceed to develop the reasons why a cause of this kind should have results of so grave a character; but if I did so I should be thought to be indulging in controversy. For my present purpose, all I wish to do is to point out that history is not in general concerned with the personal characters or the individual motives of action of the puppets who play their parts on its stage, but that all events are the necessary results of long chains of causes. The woe which waits upon the individual who does not perform his part, or who, as in the case of Judas, takes upon himself the responsibility of working out the evil that the destinies are calling for, is the business of the biographer; the historian has to do with the remoter general causes.

Mr. Lecky quotes Carlyle as the representative of those who reduce all history into biography, as the action of a few great men upon their kind : and this is true, so far as regards his *Frederick the Great*, his *Cromwell*, his *Lectures on Hero Worship*, but even he cannot keep up the theory. In his great work on the French Revolution, perhaps the greatest historical work of our time, he fully recognises that it is not to the action of any one individual, but to the combined operation of causes extended over a long period of time, that the events of that epoch must be traced.

“Shall we say,” he asks, “Wo to Philosophism, that it destroyed religion — what it called extinguishing the abomination? Wo rather to those that made the Holy an abomination and extinguishable; wo to all men that live in such a time of world-abomination and world-destruction! Nay, answer the courtiers, it was Turgot, it was Necker, with their mad innovations; it was the Queen’s want of etiquette; it was he, it was she, it was that. Friends! it was every scoundrel that had lived, and quack-like, pretended to be doing, and had been only eating and misdoing, in all provinces of life, as Shoebblack or as Sovereign Lord, each in his degree, from the time of Charlemagne and earlier. All this (for be sure no falsehood perishes, but is as seed sown out to grow) has been storing itself for thousands of years; and now the account day has come. And rude will the settlement be: of wrath laid up against the day of wrath. O my brother, be not thou a quack! Die rather, if thou wilt take counsel; ’tis but dying once, and thou art quit of it for ever. Cursed is that trade; and bears curses, thou knowest not how, long ages after thou art departed, and the wages thou hadst are all consumed; nay, as the ancient wise have written,

through Eternity itself, and is verily marked in the Doom Book of a God."

Mr. Lecky dwells, however, not merely on the element of individual character as shaping the course of history, but also on that of pure accident. He quotes the saying of Pascal, that if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the whole face of the world might have been changed; and he reminds us that Voltaire is never tired of dwelling on the small springs on which the greatest events of history have turned; and that Frederick the Great, who had probably the keenest practical intellect of his age, constantly insisted on the same view, and maintained that, in the vast field of politics, casual events which no human sagacity can predict play by far the largest part; that the world is mainly governed by a multitude of secondary, obscure, or impenetrable causes. "It is a game of chance, in which the most skilful may lose like the most ignorant. King Hazard fashions three-fourths of the events in this miserable world."

If this view were sound, which we gravely doubt, it would detract largely from the dignity and usefulness of history, especially in the direction of inculcating lessons for the future guidance of mankind in the like emergencies, which is the main motive that has been always put forward by historians for their work. If the face of the world had been in any real sense liable to be changed by the circumstance that Cleopatra did or did not captivate by her beauty one or more individuals, the writing its history would not be the work of a scientific reasoner, who knows that causes produce effects, it would be

rather the work of a collector of anecdotes, who seeks to amuse his readers by some unexpected termination of a commonplace event, to drag into prominence things *bizarre* and unusual, and to whom it never occurs to lay down general laws, or to trace the relation of effects to cause.

Buckle, indeed, remarks that this is a fault common to the generality of historians, of whom the most celebrated are inferior to the successful cultivators of physical science, and that no one has devoted himself to history who in point of intellect is at all to be compared with Kepler, Newton, or others. Bacon he excepts, but remarks that he wrote on history only as a subordinate object, and it evidently cost him nothing like the thought which he devoted to other subjects. There is no branch of physical or moral science in which a mere "sport" or occasional variety would be treated as interfering with the general laws affecting the species under observation. The scientific observer of natural facts knows that like must produce its like, and that no change in the orderly sequence of events takes place by mere chance: he has learned indeed to banish chance from the vocabulary, and the historian should do the same.

Buckle's teaching as to the materials out of which a philosophical history can alone be constructed may best be expressed in his own words:

"On the one hand, we have the human mind obeying the law of its own existence, and, when uncontrolled by external agents, developing itself according to the conditions of its organisation. On the other hand, we have what is called Nature, obeying likewise its law, but incessantly



coming into contact with the minds of men, exciting their passions, stimulating their intellect, and therefore giving to their actions a direction which they would not have taken without such disturbance. Thus we have man modifying nature and nature modifying man; while out of this reciprocal modification all events must necessarily spring."

For the purpose of ascertaining the method of discovering the laws of this double modification, and which of the two modifications is the more important, he relies, as you are aware, on the evidence of statistics.

It is not within the scope of this discourse to discuss at length the masterly statistical arguments by which Buckle establishes the fact that events in human life which seem beyond all others to be the result of individual human will are found to recur with such regularity as to prove that a law exists by which they are controlled. It will be better for our present purpose to proceed at once to show how the acceptance of this truth ought to affect the point of view taken by the writers of history, and to modify in the like degree their literary treatment of the historic facts. The results of a war, for example, will be seen to be more marked in the movement of the population, by the loss of so many young and active members of it as fell in the various engagements, than by any mere delimitations of territory or conditions of treaties between the contending rulers.

The change of one dynasty for another will not be regarded as interesting in itself, or from the



personal characters of the monarchs concerned, but will be watched in respect of any social effect it may have upon the masses of the people, any modification of their ways of thinking of which it may be the sign rather than the cause. An alteration in the form of government, or even in the established religion, will not be treated as a fact in itself so much as the result of a series of facts leading to and culminating in the great and apparently sudden or violent event. The alliances between states will cease to be worked out through the tortuous mazes of the diplomacy which led up to them—the attempts of the ministers of the one state to overreach the other, the lies and frauds of the negotiators, and will be watched rather in their influence on the peoples.

It is true that, as one of our quotations from Bacon implied, it is one of the functions of history to teach sovereigns and statesmen (if we may be permitted to use Lord Beaconsfield's phrase) by the example of the fate that has happened to others before them acting in the like circumstances. Mr. Lecky (the subject of whose lecture is the Political Value of History) says that there has scarcely been a great revolution in the world which might not at some stage of its progress have been either averted, or materially modified, or at least greatly postponed, by wise statesmanship and timely compromise; and he mentions the French Revolution and the War of American Independence as cases in point. Yet he admits that history is never more valuable than when it enables us, standing as on a height, to look beyond the smoke and turmoil of

our petty quarrels, and to detect in the slow developments of the past the great permanent forces that are steadily bearing nations onward to improvement or decay; and he urges with admirable force that the strongest of these forces are the moral ones, and that the permanent political well-being of nations is essentially the outcome of their moral state. "Its foundation is laid in pure domestic life, in commercial integrity, in a high standard of moral worth and of public spirit."

The mistake that is committed when history is looked at from the point of view only of the sovereigns and the statesmen, is well illustrated by a valuable little work just published by Mr. Reginald Brett, under the title of *Footprints of Statesmen during the Eighteenth Century in England*. He says acutely that a careful examination of the career of great men suffices to convince us that when a hero or a statesman dies, it nearly always happens that his arc of usefulness is complete. He quotes an anecdote of the Duke of Wellington, in 1839, walking in the garden at Walmer, and lamenting the decline of the British Empire, an Empire that, as we know it now, was then still in swaddling clothes. The great work of the Duke's own life was over, and it was not an unnatural mistake on his part to think that his country's work was over too. Mr. Brett proceeds to say, however, that it is not essential, although it may be desirable, that an ordinary English lad should know that England existed before Queen Anne came to the throne. Here the vice of the doctrine and practice comes out; the accession of Queen Anne originated some political changes,

but it was no break in the continuity of the history of the country and of the masses of people who inhabit it.

The true materials for history are not so much the protocols of ambassadors, the biographies of kings and statesmen, or even the debates in parliament, as they are those numerous indications of the moral forces that sway the real life of the people that are to be found in their social and domestic records. Vast political changes may pass over a people without leaving the least trace on their real life, and it is in the close observation of this inner life that the progress of the nation may best be measured. The materials for this kind of research have been greatly increased of late years; the societies established for the publication of local records, the several societies which have busied themselves with investigations into early legal history, the researches of antiquaries into every branch of our ancient social life, even its folklore, are gradually creating a wealth of material that the true historian of the future will find available for the description of the actual life of those who form the nation.

With these principles of the literary treatment of history the names of three illustrious historians of our own time are intimately associated—Freeman, Stubbs, and Green. It is only for us to compare their works with those to which we were accustomed in our school-days to see how large a step in advance has been taken. The favourite, almost the only, history books of our youth were Goldsmith, Hume, and Smollett. While no one will deny the literary excellence of Hume, and indeed also of Smollett's

continuation, there can be little doubt that the ideas they instilled into our youthful minds were false to the real teaching of history. The occasional chapter which they allotted to manners and customs of the people gave us little real idea of the sort of people that our ancestors were: nor in this were the authors to be blamed, for they could not communicate that which they did not possess.

Another advantage we have over the historians of the earlier period when this Society was instituted, is in the means of a sounder and more critical appreciation of the value of the materials for history afforded by the old chroniclers and other records which are the common property of both classes of historians. The art of falsifying historic records is one that began to be practised very soon, and has been continued in various ways, and the critical skill which detects the falsification is one of the most necessary equipments of the compiler of history, especially with regard to those documents which come from interested custody. It is here that the historian of the people has an immense advantage over the student of chronicles and treaties, for the documents upon which he founds his knowledge are such as no person would have the motive, even if he had the power, to falsify, or alter, or twist from their meaning.

In a letter recently published, Mr. Herbert Spencer has remarked on the need for criticising and revising historical statements. He says, "All history has been written by men more or less biassed or prejudiced, and has necessarily been vitiated by garbling and exaggeration." This is a caution very necessary to

ERRATUM.

Page 55, *for* John Robert Green  
:           *read* John Richard Green.



be borne in mind: while Alison's great history was, as we all know, written to prove that Providence was on the side of the Tories, Macaulay's was in like manner written to show that the Whigs were in the right. We need hardly repeat the good old story of the physician who prescribed to his patient the reading of Macaulay's history or some other work of fiction. Is there any better correction to this tendency to take a false view of events according to our own prejudices than that of looking upon them as they really are, as the result of an infinite number of diverse causes?

Considered in this light, we may almost share the opinion of Professor Burrows, that the real historian has, after all, yet to be evolved: and that, although we have been gradually approaching him by slow degrees, he has not yet reached us. We may, however, at least say this much—that when he comes, he will find the way made smooth and plain for him by the labours of the great men whose names I have mentioned as the types of the modern historian—by Freeman, by Stubbs, and especially by Mr. John Robert Green. That he will, when he arrives, be altogether superior to the claims of party or prejudice, may be too much to hope; at least, we shall be the better able to detect and avoid any defect he may show in that direction the more we avail ourselves of the materials we now possess.

An element to be gravely considered in this question of the literary treatment of history, is that of the audience which the historian addresses; that audience is now commensurate with the whole population, just as the balance of power has shifted from



crown and courtier, noble and landowner, to the people at large. The large extensions of the franchise which have resulted in making our governments more and more democratic, have been accompanied with a large and liberal provision for the education of all classes of the people, and hence it follows that the historian of the future must address the real, not the nominal, rulers. He must tell them that which most concerns them; the events and the morals he draws from them must be those which are serviceable to the people in guiding them in the expression of their will at the polling booths; and that will have the greatest weight with them which touches their interests most.

The old monkish chronicler, who wrote his annals for the benefit of his successors in the cloister, could think of nothing more interesting or important than when this bishop or that abbot died and was succeeded by another, what gifts this or that king gave to the Church, and how good he was. The compiler of those curious old rolls of history, written in Norman-French, which used to be kept in the houses of the nobles and gentry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to serve as manuals for the instruction of their children and retainers in the facts of English history, would also suit himself to his audience. He would be a churchman of course, and would take care to point out that those who did not love and honour Holy Church came to a bad end; but he would record also the accessions of kings, the famous battles, the alliances by marriage of members of the royal family with the great feudal houses, and so forth.

Take, for example, an event which was a real

turning point in the economic history of our country and affected it for generations—the great pestilence of 1349, called the Black Death, the ravages of which may be estimated from the circumstance that in one City company as many members died in that one year as had died in the forty years preceding. It was no doubt a more considerable fact than even the victory of Cressy or the foundation of the Order of the Garter—yet how much will the historians make of either of those events in comparison with it? The miserable conditions of existence out of which it arose, the terrible misery and depopulation which accompanied it—as scarcely one-third, it is alleged, of the inhabitants of the country survived—the misery wrought by the mistaken remedies applied to the economic condition of the country, are surely matters more worthy of historic treatment than the intercession of Queen Philippa for the burgesses of Calais or the building of St. Stephen's at Westminster.

The board school boy of to-day is the voter, and in not a few cases will be the legislator, of a few years hence; and it is the function of teaching the future ruler by the example of the past that the historian of to-day has to exercise towards him. What can be more vital to his interests than to know what sanitary errors those were that gave rise to this awful visitation? for such there must have been, if we have faith to believe that death is the wages of sin, and that pestilence is nature's vindication of her right to have her laws regarded. What can be more essential than that he should understand clearly that when a sudden change has come over the relations of capital

to labour, force, in the shape of a statute of labourers, is not the remedy that is called for, but nature will have all her laws obeyed, economic and physical?

I have possibly said enough on the moral and didactic and educational uses of historic literature, and it is time I turned briefly to the consideration of that which must after all be its principal literary element, the manner of selecting and telling those historic incidents which dwell on the memory for ever. For selection, the historian is under a great temptation to let the poetic temperament, which must be strong in him, if he is to hit the public taste at all, prevail over the critical and sceptical turn of mind which is still more necessary to him if he would not mislead the public. That you may not suppose this to be the mere carping commentary of an outsider, I will quote in support of it the criticism of one great historian upon another, for though we are told dog will not eat dog, authors often display a certain pleasing frankness in their criticisms upon one another.

Macaulay gives an example of the way in which well known tales have been handed down.

“They originally appeared in a poetical form. They found their way from ballads into an old chronicle. The ballads perished; the chronicle remained. A great historian, some centuries after the ballads had been altogether forgotten, consulted the chronicle. He was struck by the lively colouring of these ancient fictions; he transferred them to his pages; and thus we find inserted, as unquestionable facts, in a narrative which is likely to last as long as the English tongue, the inventions of some minstrel, whose works were probably never committed to writing, whose name is buried in oblivion, and whose dialect has become obsolete.”

This is the example—

“History,” says Hume with the utmost gravity, “has preserved some instances of Edgar’s amours, from which, as from a specimen, we may form a conjecture of the rest.”

“He then tells very agreeably the stories of Elfreda and Elfrida, two stories which have a most suspicious air of romance, and which indeed greatly resemble in their general character some of the legends of early Rome. He cites, as his authority for these two tales, the Chronicle of William of Malmesbury, who lived in the time of King Stephen. The great majority of readers suppose that the device by which Elfreda was substituted for her young mistress, the artifice by which Athelwold obtained the hand of Elfrida, the detection of that artifice, the hunting party, and the vengeance of the amorous king, are things about which there is no more doubt than about the execution of Anne Boleyn, or the slitting of Sir John Coventry’s nose. But when we turn to William of Malmesbury, we find that Hume, in his eagerness to relate these pleasant fables, has overlooked one very important circumstance. William does indeed tell both the stories; but he gives us distinct notice that he does not warrant their truth, and that they rest on no better authority than that of ballads.”

After reading this, one feels that to set an historian to catch an historian, is almost as good sport as the old proverb testifies that the setting a thief to catch a thief ought to be. Indeed, when we look into most of the tales which pass for history in our early annals, we shall find, if I am not mistaken, traces of romance which will bring us in touch with the old

fabulists of all times and all places, and shall have to relegate much to folk-lore. Such stories, moreover, as that which we derive from Bæda of Gregory's feeble jests in the slave market at Rome, savour to my mind very much of the dreary facetiousness of some Northumbrian cloister—the questions, by whom heard, how treasured, why related, are questions to which I see no very trustworthy answer.

While I counsel a healthy scepticism, it must be also remembered that this may be carried to a fault; and I have frequently felt a glow of righteous indignation at attacks on the veracity of the grand old father of history, Herodotus, who deserves, I am inclined to think, more credit than he receives. One thing is obvious to me throughout his writings, and that is the perfect good faith which marks his inquiries into the manners and customs of the peoples whom he describes, and inspires him in the record he gives of the result of his researches among the priests and others he consulted. And the stories he tells of these manners and customs, extraordinary as some of them seem to be, have been wonderfully confirmed by the more recent observations of anthropologists on the like manners and customs as observed to be prevalent among the savage races of our day, in a similarly low stage of civilization.

He is not fairly to be represented as the credulous swallower of every strange story that was told to him; he displays in many places a high critical faculty, and shows cause why things that he has heard should not be accepted implicitly without some degree of critical inquiry into their real foundation. Take for example his discussion of the origin of the

oracles of Dodona and Libya respectively; how the priests of the Theban Jupiter held that two women, employed at their temple, had been carried away and sold in those two directions, and had profited by what they learned in Thebes to establish oracles. The prophetesses of Dodona, however, held that the oracles had been brought to Greece and Libya by two doves, gifted with human speech to impress the people as with a divine message, and Herodotus strives to harmonize these two stories, and to get a metaphorical meaning out of that of the Dodonæan doves.

I must not, however, allow myself to be betrayed into further discussion of the merits of the father of history, for the object of the present discourse relates rather to the historians of our own time, since this Society was founded, and to those of our own country, than to those of old. I quoted, some time ago, the severe criticism of Buckle on our historians, in which he said that the most celebrated of them were inferior to the successful cultivators of physical science, which may or may not be true; but if true, is not the only thing to be considered for our purpose. For there can be no doubt that, in respect of every consideration of literary excellence, the votaries of Clio can claim a very high place; that the writings of our historians for generations past have been the best models of literary style, and that some of their works are veritable masterpieces of literature.

To establish this assertion, I need do little more than repeat the great names which I have had occasion already to mention, and point out how from generation to generation this branch of literature has



forced itself on the attention of the brightest intellects and the finest masters of English of the age. Where in his time shall we find a writer whose literary style is superior to that of Sir Thomas More, and where among his works shall we discover any written in purer English than his historical treatises? Contrast them with his own controversial works, or with others handed down from that turbulent age. Bacon I have already cited in his own words; and whether Buckle is right or wrong in saying that his historical works cost him little trouble, at least I may assert that he wrote them in good English, and that they are not unworthy literary relics of the spacious times of great Elizabeth.

The next age was too busy in the making of history to do much toward the writing of it; the stirring times of the Great Rebellion however found on both sides of the question an able chronicler, Clarendon for the Royalists, and Bulstrode Whitelocke—though his acquirements were rather lawyer-like than literary—for the Commonwealth. Fortunately, however, we have in our own time made up for the defect by the great historical work of one of our own literary giants, the life and letters of Oliver Cromwell by Thomas Carlyle. It is curious to read his own criticism in his address to the students of Edinburgh on the labours of his brother historians.

“Upon the whole,” he says, “I do not think that, in general, out of common history books, you will ever get into the real history of this country, or anything particular which it would become you to know. You may read very ingenious and very clever books by men whom it would be the height of insolence in me to do any other thing than express my respect



for. But their position is essentially sceptical. Man is unhappily in that condition that he will make only a temporary explanation of anything, and you will not be able, if you are like the man, to understand how this island came to be what it is. You will not find it recorded in books. You will find recorded in books a jumble of tumults, disastrous ineptitudes, and all that kind of thing."

Still he thinks the history of England beyond all others to be worthy of study, because he believes that the British nation has produced a finer set of men than any you will find it possible to get anywhere else in the world. Then he proceeds to reduce this patriotic generalization to a single particular, after his fashion, by saying—

"I don't know, in any history, where you will get so fine a man as Oliver Cromwell."

Of the literary merits of Lord Macaulay's *History of England* it is almost superfluous to speak; those who are old enough to remember its first appearance will not have forgotten the admiration it excited by the eloquence of the language, and will recollect the tribute of universal popularity to its beauty of style.

"Unless I greatly deceive myself," he wrote, "the general effect of this chequered narrative will be to excite thankfulness in all religious minds, and hope in the breasts of all patriots. For the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement. Those who compare the age on which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in their imagination, may talk of degeneracy and decay; but no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of

the present. I should very imperfectly execute the task which I have undertaken," he proceeds, "if I were merely to treat of battles and sieges, of the rise and fall of administrations, of intrigues in the palace, and of debates in the parliament. It will be my endeavour to relate the history of the people as well as the history of the government, to trace the progress of useful and ornamental arts, to describe the rise of religious sects and the changes of literary taste, to portray the manners of successive generations, and not to pass by with neglect even the revolutions which have taken place in dress, furniture, repasts, and public amusements. I shall cheerfully bear the reproach of having descended below the dignity of history, if I can succeed in placing before the English of the nineteenth century a true picture of the life of their ancestors."

In this, however, we think, consists the true dignity of history.

Among the historians of our own time there are two whose names I think ought not to be omitted in this connection—Charles Knight and William Howitt—the one the author of the *Popular History of England*—the other of the *History of England* which goes by the name of Cassell's, the publishers. Neither of these excellent writers claims the credit of original research among unpublished documents, but both are entitled to be honourably mentioned for the practised literary skill with which they have weaved the common materials of history into a narrative that has attracted many a reader to the study of his country's history. Knight takes his text from an observation in the *Times* newspaper in October, 1854—

"When a young man of eighteen asks for a History of England, there is no resource but to give him Hume. The

cool, scoffing philosopher, who could relate with unruffled temper the outrages of despotism, the cries of kings, and the extravagances of superstition, and reserved his criticisms for genius and his sarcasms for zeal, still retains his place on our shelves and our tables."

Knight adds that "when we are content to forget the scoffing philosopher in the narrative powers of one of the most perfect masters of style—and can even patiently endure his studied perversions of historical evidence in our wonder at the skill of the most subtle of casuists, we have yet to seek for a History of England."

That we have more recently obtained in the writings of a living author, and though we were advised by Mr. Ames not to discuss living authors, I must once again mention the historical writings of a gentleman to whom I have already made frequent allusion as a master of English style as well as a most painstaking student of English history—I mean Mr. Lecky—whose historical works adorn the last quarter of this century.

If I have detained you too long, it is for the reason that the subject is one which calls rather for a whole series of lectures than a single discourse. Whether for the abiding interest that waits upon the narratives, for the wide issues that are raised by their teachings, or for the personal culture that the knowledge of history implies and develops, it lays claim to a literary treatment commensurate with its origin, its methods, and its aims. If the elementary and superficial introduction to the subject, which is all that it has been within my power to attempt, should serve to deepen in any one here that love for historical

studies and especially for the study of the history of our own country and our own times, which is the best security for good citizenship and the surest guarantee of a wise discharge of the responsibilities of life, I shall feel that my tediousness has been well bestowed.

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## MYSTERIES AND MIRACLE PLAYS.

BY R. B. HOLT, F.R.S.L.

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It is so much easier to teach people of little intelligence by combining spectacular effects with oral instruction that, being an ease-loving as well as an erudite fraternity, the priesthood of every age and race has instinctively adopted some sort of dramatic representation for the exposition of its sacred mysteries.

The earliest Biblical drama of which we have any record is one by Ezekiel, the Jewish tragic poet.<sup>1</sup> When he wrote it is uncertain. He was long believed to have been one of the interpreters employed by Ptolemy Philadelphus to translate the Hebrew scriptures. If so, he lived about 170 B.C. Warton, however, thinks that his play was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and consequently that a much later period must be assigned to him. The few fragments of his drama which have reached us are in Greek.

The subject is the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. The characters are Moses, Sapphira, and God. The Deity speaks from the burning bush, so He probably did not appear personally.

<sup>1</sup> Warton, *Hist. of Poetry*, p. 566

Moses delivers a prologue of some sixty lines and his rod is turned into a serpent on the stage. There is therefore nothing to distinguish this work from what were afterwards known as miracle plays.

When Christianity became an established faith the expounders of it naturally followed the example of their predecessors, and, as they too found the drama an expedient both profitable and efficacious, it soon became an established institution with them.

Gregory Nazianzen, Patriarch of Constantinople, and the master of Jerome, appears to have been the first who made a regular attempt to supersede the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, which, in his day, were still periodically represented, and which, by keeping alive the traditions of the older faith, were a serious hindrance to the progress of Christianity.

The good father acted in an intelligent and practical manner. He recognised the beauty of the old plays both in construction and diction. He knew that the people were familiar with and partial to these dramas, so, instead of denouncing the public taste, he wisely conformed to it, adopted the approved models, changed the plots and incidents, and converted the gods and heroes of antiquity into orthodox angels and saints.

Gregory wrote many plays, but only one of them is still extant. It is a tragedy called "Christ's Passion,"<sup>2</sup> and till the time of the Reformation it was regularly acted by the Mendicant Friars of Coventry.

<sup>2</sup> Warton, p. 568.

The prologue terms it an imitation of Euripides<sup>3</sup> and asserts that this is the first appearance of the Virgin Mary on the stage.

Clement Alexandrinum,<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, St. Cyprian, and St. Augustine also wrote plays on the Greek models, so none can pretend that sacred dramas were not introduced with sufficient clerical authority.

Appolinaris,<sup>5</sup> Bishop of Laodicea, however, seems to have been the most prolific of these old playwrights. He, too, wrote Greek tragedies in the manner of Euripides, and dramatised most of the grand events recorded in the Old Testament. He also composed comedies in imitation of Menander on some of the familiar and domestic Scripture stories.

This is a very interesting incident and aptly illustrates the impossibility of extinguishing that harmless hilarity by which the joyousness of life is so appropriately expressed.

The early Christians could be piously penitent; they could have a proper reverence for professional saints, and could even copy their austerities with suitable mitigations; but a religion of gloom outraged their instincts of happiness, and the love of laughter refused to be suppressed. So, with consummate tact, the Bishops determined to lead the movement they were unable to withstand, and henceforth comedy became a recognised feature of sacred plays. Unfortunately the reaction proved too strong. Innocent mirth soon degenerated into coarse frivolity, and restriction after restriction being relaxed, at last blasphemy and buffoonery were consummated when

<sup>3</sup> Fosbrook, p. 592.

<sup>4</sup> Menetret Tournoise, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Warton, p. 565.



in A.D. 990 the patriarch Theophylact instituted the Feast of Fools and the Feast of Asses.

Such a prostitution of things then held to be sacred naturally met with much opposition from the best and wisest of the clergy.

In A.D. 1050 Cedrenus writes : "Theophylact introduced the practice, which prevails to this day, of scandalising God and His saints on the most splendid and popular festivals by indecent and ridiculous songs and enormous shoutings, even in the midst of those sacred hymns which we ought to offer to the divine grace with compunction of heart for the salvation of our souls. Having collected a company of base fellows and placed over them Euthymius, surnamed Casmes, whom he hath also appointed superintendent of his church, he admitted into the sacred service dances, exclamations of ribaldry, and ballads borrowed from the streets and brothels."

Of course all right-minded persons will endorse this condemnation, but, however much we may abhor the spirit which found expression in such profanity we must not impute that spirit to the fathers of Miracle Plays. They appear to have been earnest simple-minded men who saw that many preferred a gay play to a solemn mass, and thought they could further the interests of their church by giving scriptural object lessons to the people in the only manner that was acceptable to them.

The Italians were the first to adopt the Constantinople fashion. From Italy it is said to have passed to France, and from France to our own land. How the custom was transmitted is uncertain, but it was

probably introduced in several different ways.<sup>6</sup> Warton observes that, "About the eighth century trade was principally carried on by fairs. The merchants, to attract customers, employed jugglers, minstrels, and buffoons. The clergy observing that the entertainment thus provided drew people away from the churches, proscribed these sports and excommunicated the performers. Finding no regard was paid to their censures, they too turned actors, and, instead of profane mummeries, presented stories taken from legends or from the Bible."

This is ascribing a sort of spontaneous generation to the plays. A need of amusement arises in a community, and the means of satisfying it forthwith organise themselves.

Boileau has rather a different opinion. He says: "When pilgrims returned from the Holy Land they composed songs on their adventures, intermixed with passages from the life of Christ and descriptions of his crucifixion,<sup>7</sup> of the Day of Judgment, of miracles and martyrdoms. These they recited in a pathetic chant and with appropriate gesticulations. They stood in the public streets with their staves in their hands, while their hats and their mantles were fantastically adorned with shells and emblems painted in various colours. These representations were called visions. Afterwards a stage was erected and professional actors took the parts."

It is probable that both these factors assisted in popularising the performances and their co-existence is not repugnant to reason.

One of the earliest plays is called "The Death of

<sup>6</sup> *Hist. Poetry*, p. 565.

<sup>7</sup> Warton, p. 567.

St. Catherine." It appears to have been first acted by the monks of St. Denis, who, we are told, performed so well that they soon became as popular as the professional actors.<sup>8</sup> In the eleventh century this play was performed by the novices of Dunstable Abbey under the superintendence of Geoffrey, a Parisian ecclesiastic who ultimately became Abbot of St. Albans.

Hilarius, an Englishman who studied under Abelard, wrote a number of pieces, fifteen of which still remain. One of his interludes, "The Image of St. Nicholas," was regularly performed in churches dedicated to that saint. It may serve to illustrate this description of play.

On his fête day the saint's image was removed from its shrine and a living actor, suitably dressed, took its place. A break was made in the service and a man, representing a rich heathen, entered the church door, made his way to the shrine, and there deposited his worldly belongings, saying that he was going a long journey, so he charged the saint to take care of his goods. As soon as he departed some thieves entered and stole his treasures. Presently the heathen returns to have a last look at them, and, enraged to find that his goods have been stolen, he seizes a whip and thrashes the image of the saint. It moves, descends from its niche, goes out, finds the robbers, reasons with them, and threatens to denounce them to the people. Terrified by this miracle, the thieves restore the property, while the heathen, converted by it, becomes a good Christian and the service is resumed as if nothing had happened.

<sup>8</sup> Warton, p. 563.

William Fitz-Stephen,<sup>9</sup> a monk of Canterbury, who died A.D. 1191, says, "Interludes belonging to the theatre were plays of holy subjects representing the miracles wrought by the saints, with the acts and pious sufferings of the Blessed Martyrs."

"These holy and religious matters continued for a long time to be the only subject for the drama. They had also plays in which were represented the person and actions of our Blessed Saviour, the Virgin Mary, and twelve apostles."

It seems then most probable that about the tenth or eleventh century sacred dramas were tolerably well known in England, but the earliest of them appear to have been written in Latin, and so they would only be pantomimes to the unlettered multitude.

Sacred dramas are roughly divided into three classes:—First, Mysteries, or rhythmic recitations alternating with choruses. These plays are simply Biblical stories tediously diluted with orthodox theology, and the authors were so happily oblivious of chronology that in them the Devil of Genesis vows to his God Mahomet and the patriarch Noah swears by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

The next class are termed Miracle Plays,<sup>10</sup> and are supposed to deal solely with miracles performed by Biblical characters or by the saints of church tradition.

The third set are Moralities which start with the set purpose of inculcating some special moral lesson, without directly using scriptural or legendary events. In our English plays, however, these distinctions are

<sup>9</sup> Strutt, vol. ii, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Andrews' *Curiosities of the Church*.

so little marked that it is generally a matter of caprice rather than of judgment as to which class a given play shall be assigned.

What are termed interludes were short pieces of a light, and often of a comic character, which were introduced either between two portions of the regular church service or between two acts of a sacred drama.

The literary merits of all these productions are not of a very high order. The ideas are commonplace, the language by no means classical, and in many cases the authors trust to the reciters to meet the exigencies of rhyme, rhythm, and metre. Some of them, indeed, seem to have anticipated the genius who began all his lines with capitals; made each of them so many inches in length, and then claimed to have written poetry. In certain instances, however, there is a wealth of alliteration that will satisfy the most exacting; for instance, in introducing the Coventry Plays, "Primus Vexillator," says:—

"Now graceous God groundyd of alle goodnesse,  
As thi grete glorie nevyr begynnyng had,  
So thou socour and save alle tho that sytt and sese  
And lysten to our talkyng with sylens styлле and sad;  
For we purpose us pertly styлле in this presse,  
The pepyl to plese with plays ful glad  
Now lystenyth us, lovely, bothe more and lesse,  
Gentyllys and yomanry of goodly lyff lad.  
This tyde  
We xal you showe, as that we kan,  
How that this werd ffyrst began  
And God made both molde and man  
Iff that ye wyl abyde."

Of course there are many opinions as to the value of alliteration, and doubtless it, as well as rhyme and rhythm, imposes fetters upon an author. But these fetters are only the laws of harmony, and when noble thoughts and beautiful ideas are embodied in language that truly conforms to those laws, a perfect melody is evoked that not only captivates the ear but gives a vitality to each expression, which enables it to grapple the memory, and ever after to retain a hold upon it. Little wonder, then, that all poets have courted these three graces of their noble art, and sometimes, in their love of them, have defied the capricious limitations that pendants would impose.

Another thing which may be noticed is that in these dramas, when the plot is a New Testament story, the incidents and ideas are largely taken from the Apocryphal gospels in preference to the canonical scriptures; the gospel of Nicodemus being a favourite source of information.

The treatment of the subjects was extremely realistic, so much so indeed, that in the Chester plays, after the creation of Eve, the stage direction reads thus:—

“Then Adam and Eve shall stande nackede and shall not be ashamed”; while, in the Coventry version, after the Fall, our first parents not only discuss their nudity, but Adam instructs Eve in the art of wearing fig-leaves properly. Still, so long as the representations were entirely confined to the monks, dull decorum probably prevailed, but when professional players were introduced, and the Trade Guilds undertook the production of the dramas, there seems to have been no little pandering to the



coarse tastes and love of fun which characterised their audiences.

Stevens tells us that, in these plays, there was always a droll or buffoon. This buffoon was the Devil, and vinegar was applied to his nose to make him roar. His tormentor was another buffoon called the Vice. This character was accoutred in a long jerkin, his cap had asses' ears, and he carried a long dagger made of lath. This he wore on his back, whence he drew it from time to time to make sport and to belabour the Devil.

Archbishop Harsnet gives us a more detailed account of the proceedings of this worthy. In his *Declaration of Popish Impostures*, we read, "It was a pretty part in the Old Church Plays when the nimble Vice would skip up like a jackanapes, and belabour Satan with his wooden dagger till he made him roar, when the people would laugh to see the Devil so Vice-haunted."<sup>11</sup> Fosbrook says his stage directions were to lay about him with a long pole, and to tumble the characters one over the other with great noise and riot.

Strutt informs us that the stage consisted of three several platforms raised one above another. On the uppermost sat God (a venerable figure with gilded face, hair and beard), while around Him stood His angels in radiant attire.

On the second platform appeared the saints and on the floor below them were mortals.<sup>12</sup> On one side of this lowest platform was a dark pitchy cavern (usually in the form of a huge fish's mouth). From

<sup>11</sup> Fosbrook, p. 593.

<sup>12</sup> Strutt's *Sports*, p. 260.



this cavern issued appearances of fire and flames, and, when it was necessary, the audience were treated with hideous yellings and noises to represent the howls and cries of the wretched souls tormented by restless demons. From this yawning cave the Devils themselves constantly ascended to delight and instruct the spectators.

Now when we remember that such plays were often performed in churches, and that their ostensible object was religious instruction, our notions of propriety are naturally shocked by such proceedings, and the means seem ill adapted to the end. Still, we must remember that, in those days, *Paradise Lost* had not been written, nor had the Puritans preached their Gospel of gloom, and denounced laughter as an abomination to the author of it. Besides, we are constrained to admit that even such buffoonery was no more at variance with the decorum of that age, than are the vagaries of the Salvation Army with the propriety of our own times. Consequently, if good can come out of the one, there is no reason why the other should not have been equally beneficial. At any rate, it is in these tentative departures from the dead letter of conventional piety that we perceive the first glimmer of that divine light which, nursed by popular appreciation and purified by intelligent criticism, shone forth so resplendently in Jonson, Shakespeare, and other immortal dramatists.

But what does amaze us is that, for the sake of maintaining their own supremacy, the priests of the God of Love should have encouraged their simple-minded people to rejoice in the sufferings of others,

and to laugh at the antics of the fiend who tortured the miserable. Even the simulation of such horrors could have had but a brutalising effect, and must have impaired that feeling of brotherhood which the Founder of Christianity so commended to His disciples.

We can only infer that, while the priesthood found Hell a convenient bugbear wherewith to frighten children and imbeciles, as a body, they had ceased to believe in its actuality, and had come to regard the Devil as a grand joke, a zany to be trotted out at fair times as the best stimulant to coarse jocularity.

When the Trade Guilds undertook the plays, much more efficient arrangements were made than were possible for the monks, and authors were encouraged to exercise their creative faculties. Consequently, in the later versions of the plays, we find many original conceptions, and the manners and customs of the times are often faithfully depicted.

Each trade had its own play, and provided a stage and suitable pageant at its own cost, but the Civic authorities seem to have exercised a general supervision of the whole.

The York municipal records contain some very interesting accounts of what was customary in that city, for instance:—

In A.D. 1476<sup>13</sup> an order was made that “Yerely in the tyme of Lentyn there shall be called afore the Maire, for the tyme beyng, four of the most conyng, discrete and able plaiers within this city, to serche, here and examen all the plaiers, plaies and pagents,

<sup>13</sup> Davis, p. 237.

throughout all the artificers belonging to Corpus Xti plaie : and all such as they shall fynde sufficient in persone and conyng to the honor of the city and the worship of the craftes, for to admitte, and all other insufficient personnes, either in conyng, voice or persone, to discharge, amove and avoide. And that no plaier that sall plaie in Corpus Xti plaie be conducte and retained to plaie but twise on the day of the saide plaie, and that he or thay so plaieng, plaie not over twise the said day upon payne of XLs to forfeit unto the Chamber as oft times as he or they shall be found defaultre in the same."

At this time the upper platform had been discarded, and the scaffold was divided into two stages, the upper one being open at the top ; the lower one enclosed with tapestry and used as a dressing room. It was also often placed on wheels so that it could be moved from place to place as occasion might require. Thus when a scene was ended the stage was removed bodily, and another stage and a new company continued the representation ; consequently, different scenes of the same play would be represented simultaneously in various parts of the town.

A proclamation also enjoins "All manner of craftsmen to bringe forth their pageantes in order and course by good players well arrayed and openly spekyng, and required every player that should play, to be ready in his pageant at convenyant time, that is to say, at the mydhoure betwix iiijth and vth of the cloke in the mornyng, and then all other pageants fast following ilkon after other, as the course is, without tarieng."

Whitsuntide was the season generally selected for these plays, and the performance was the great event of the year. The fronts of the houses were decorated with tapestry, etc., and their entrances were strewed with flowers and rushes. The streets were thronged with strangers and people from the neighbouring towns. Everyone was in gala dress, and, to secure peace, everyone was required to leave his arms at home, or at his inn if he were a visitor.

Still, however, the proceedings were not always quite as orderly as could have been wished, for we find William Melton, one of the Minor Friars, and a celebrated preacher, complaining of the neglect of the divine offices, and the revellings, drunkenness, singing, and other improprieties, which resulted in people losing the indulgences granted by Urban IV to all who attended these performances.<sup>14</sup> In consequence of his protests, it was arranged that the play should be on the vigil of the feast, and the procession on the day of the festival itself.

As the York folk had no less than forty-seven plays, or, more properly, acts, in their day's programme, and each had to be repeated a considerable number of times, it must have been rather a relief to defer the long preliminary religious procession.

Another regulation made by William Bowles, Mayor, and dated 7th June, A.D. 1417, ordains "that all the pageants of the plays of Corpus Christi should be brought forth in order by the artificers of the city of York, and begin to play first at the gates of the priory of the Holy Trinity in Mikelgate; next at the door of Robert Harpham; next at the door of the

<sup>14</sup> Davis, p. 243.

late John Gyseburn ; next at Skelder-gate head and North Strete head ; next at the end of Conyng Strete towards Castle-gate ; next at the end of Juber-gate ; next at the door of Henry Wyman, deceased, in Conyng Strete ; then at the door of Adam del Brig, deceased, in Stayne-gate ; then at the end of Stayne-gate at the Minster-gates ; then at the end of Girdler-gate in Peter-gate, and lastly upon the pavement."

Thus the play was performed no less than thirteen times, which must have been a very exhausting day's work for the performers, though probably there were understudies who, from time to time, relieved the principal actors. The performances at the houses of three dead men almost warrant the conclusion that this was intended as a mark of respect for the deceased, but I can find no reason given for it.

For many years it was customary to have the plays always at the same places, but in A.D. 1417, the Council decided that this was inconvenient and contrary to the profit of the city. It was therefore ordered<sup>15</sup> "that those persons should be allowed to have the play before their houses who would pay the highest price for the privilege, but no favour should be shown, the public advantage of the whole community being only considered." In accordance with this regulation we find that in A.D. 1478 a lease of twelve years was granted to Henry and Thomas Dawson, pikemongers, at a rental of 11s. a year (equal to about £5 10s. of our money), so evidently people were willing to pay a considerable sum that they and their friends might witness the performances

<sup>15</sup> Davis, p. 241.

more comfortably. Money was also collected from the audiences, so it is probable that the Guilds were never much out of pocket.

At Chester the performances were spread over three days, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Whitsun week. On the first day they had nine plays :—

1. The Barkers and Tanners brought forth the  
Falling of Lucifer.
2. Drapers and Hosiers—The Creation of the  
World.
3. Drawers of Dee and Water leaders—Noe and  
his Shippe.
4. Barbers, Wax Chandlers, and Leeches—Abra-  
ham and Isacke.
5. Cappers,<sup>16</sup> Wire-drawers, and Pinners—King  
Balak and Balam, with Moses.
6. Wrights, Slaters, Tylers, Daubers,<sup>17</sup> and  
Thatchers—The Nativity of our Lord.
7. Paynters, Brotherers, and Glaziers—The  
Shepherd's Offering.
8. Vintners and Merchants—King Herod and the  
Mounte Victorial.
9. Mercers and Spisers—The Three Kings of  
Coline.

On Tuesday there were also nine plays :—

1. Gouldsmiths and Masons gave—The Slayinge  
of the Children by Herod.
2. Smiths, Forbers, and Pewterers—Purification  
of our Lady.

<sup>16</sup> Makers of Caps.

<sup>17</sup> Plasterers.



3. Bouchers—The Pinackle with the Woman of Canaan.
4. Glovers and Parchment-makers—The Arisinge of Lazarus from Death to Life.
5. Corvisors<sup>18</sup> and Shoemakers—The Coming of Christ to Jerusalem.
6. Bakers and Millners—Christe's Maundye with His Discyple.
7. Bowmakers, Boyers, Fletchers,<sup>19</sup> Stringers,<sup>20</sup> Cowpers, and Torners—The Scourginge of Christe.
8. Ironmongers and Ropers—The Crucifieinge of Christe.
9. Cookes, Tapsters, Hoslers, and Inn-keepers—The Harrowing of Hell.

On Wednesday there were but seven plays :—

1. Skynners, Cardmakers, Hatters, Poynters, and Girdlers produced—The Resurrection.
2. Fullers and Fusterers,<sup>21</sup>—The Castell of Emmaus and the Apostles.
3. The Taylors—Ascension of Christe.
4. Fishmongers—Whitsonday—Making of the Creed.
5. Shermen<sup>22</sup>—Profetts afore the Day of Dome.
6. Hewsters,<sup>23</sup> and Bell-founders—Anti-christe.
7. Weavers and Walkers—Domesday.

So the Chester people had a very complete summary of Biblical history.

<sup>18</sup> Clogmakers.

<sup>20</sup> Made bow-strings.

<sup>22</sup> Cloth-shearers.

<sup>19</sup> Put feathers on arrows.

<sup>21</sup> Rough carpenters.

<sup>23</sup> Huxters.



The oldest account of these plays is found in the following proclamation, of which a copy is given in the Harleian MS. No. 2013, and headed—

“The proclamtion for Whitsone playes made by Wm. Hewall, clarke of the Pendice, 24 Hen. 8, Wm. Snead, 2<sup>nd</sup> yere maior.

“For as much as old tyme, not only for the augmentation and increase of the holy and catholick faith of our Saviour Jesu Christ, and to exort the minds of comon people to good devotion and holsome doctrine therof, but also for the comenwelth and prosperity of this citty, a play and declaration of divers storeys of the Bible, beginning with the Creation and fall of Lucifer, and ending with the general judgement of the world, to be declared and played in the Whitsonne weeke, was devised and made by one S<sup>r</sup> Henry Frances, somtyme moonck of this monastrey dissolved, who obtayning and gat of Clemant, then bushop of Rome, a 1000 dayes of pardon, and of the bushop of Chester at that tyme 40 dayes of pardon graunted, from thensforth to every person resorting, in peaceble maner with good devotion, to heare and see the sayd playes from tyme to tyme, as oft as the shall be played within the sayd citty (and that every person or persons disturbing the sayd playes in any maner wise to be accused by the authority of the sayd pope Clemants bulls, untill such tyme as he or they be obsolved thereof), which playes were devised to the honour of god by John Arnway, then maior of this citty of Chester, his bretheren and whole cominalty therof, to be brought forth, declared, and played, at the cost and charges of the craftesmen and occupations of the sayd citty,

which hitherunto have from tyme to tyme used and performed the same accordingly.

“Wherfore Mr maior, in the Kings name, stratly chargeth and commandeth that every person and persons, of what estate, degree or condition so ever he or they be resorting to the sayd playes, to use themselves peaciblie, without making any asault, affray, or other disturbance, wherby the same playes shall be disturbed and that no maner of person or persons, whiche so ever he or they be, do use or weare any unlawfull weapons within the precinct of the sayd citty during the tyme of the sayd playes (not only upon payn of cursing by authority of the sayd pope Clemants bulls, but also) upon payne of enprisonment of their bodyes, and making fine to the King at Mr maiors pleasure.”

A note at the end of the proclamation tells us that “Sr Jo Arnway was maior 1327 and 1328 at which tyme these plays were written by Randall Higgenett, a monk of Chester abby and openly played in the Whitson week.” Sir Henry Frances, therefore, was probably only a reviser of the sixteenth century.

At an early period Clerkenwell was famous for its sacred dramas. They were performed at Skinner’s well, which lay a little west of the Church, but is now built over.

In July, A.D. 1390,<sup>24</sup> the parish clerks of London played there for three days before Richard II. and his Court, and received a gratuity of ten pounds. The play seems to have been similar to the Corpus Christi plays of Coventry.

<sup>24</sup> Strutt.

In 1409 the play lasted for eight days and the matter was from the Creation to Doomsday.

There appear, however, to have been rival companies in London,<sup>25</sup> for in A.D. 1378 the scholars of Paul's School presented a petition to Richard II., to "prohibit some inexpert people from presenting the history of the Old Testament to the great prejudice of the said clergy who had been at great expense in order to represent it publicly at Christmas." And in the sixth year of Edward III. it was ordered by Parliament that "a company of men called vagrants, who made masquerades through the whole city, should be whipped out of London,"<sup>26</sup> because they represented scandalous things in little ale-houses and other places where the populace assembled to see performances."

In spite, however, of these high-handed measures, and of all the spiritual weapons wielded by the clergy, what Dodsley well calls the dead sleep of the Muses ultimately came to an end. One by one the old senseless effigies of the monks became living men and women who depicted the thoughts, feelings, manners and customs of the day. The time-honoured motives were retained, but the dreary paraphrases were copiously curtailed, and in many places were replaced by sparkling, if rude, dialogue.

One of the most notable instances is that of Noah's wife who, from a subdued Oriental female, is transformed into a Western termagant. Here is a sample of the part taken from the Newcastle play.

Noah, being weary, comes home. His wife greets

<sup>25</sup> Strutt, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Strutt, p. 94.

him with seeming kindness and urges him to rise and eat, adding in an undertone—

“And soon a drink I shall give thee,  
Such drank thou never none afore.”

Noah, having emptied the cup, exclaims,

“What the devil! What drink is it?  
By my father’s soul, I have nere lost my wit.”

*Wife.*

“Noah, bode you tell me where about you wende,  
I give God vow, we two shall nere be friend.”<sup>27</sup>

Noah with meek prolixity explains that God sent an angel to bid him make a ship to escape the coming flood. The Wife replies—

“Who devil may thee a wright?  
God give him evil to fayre,  
Of hand to have such slight  
To make ship less or more perfect  
Men should have heard wide where  
When you began to smite.”

*Noah.*

“Yes, dame, it is God’s will  
Let be, so thou not say  
Go make an end I will  
And come again full throng.”

*Wife.*

“By my faith I no rake,  
Whether thou be friend or foe,  
The Devil in Hell thee speed  
To ship when thou shall go.”

<sup>27</sup> Newcastle play; “Noah’s Ark.”

At last the ark is built, and Japhet forces her on board, which the lady immediately resents by boxing her husband's ears, while Noah exclaims—

“Ha ha, marry, this is hot,  
It is good for to be still.”<sup>28</sup>

Here, of course, there is neither refined sentiment nor elegant language, but the patient plodding husband and the selfish graceless termagant are admirably depicted just as they existed in those days, and every one of the audience must have felt a lively interest in the characters.

It would seem that a guild sometimes divided its play and gave half one year, and the remainder the next year, for, in the Coventry play of King Herod the Expositor says:—

“Sofreyne and frendys, ye must alle be gret with Gode  
Grace, love, and charyte evyr be you among!  
The maydeny's sone preserve you, that for man deyed on  
rode,  
He that is o God in personys thre, defend you fro your  
fon.  
By the leve and soferauns of allemyth God  
We intendyn to procede the matere we lefte the last  
year,  
Wherefore we beseche yow that your wyllys be good  
To kepe the passion in your mend that xal be shewyd  
here.”

In this play Herod is a very terrible character, who declares—

“To kylle a thousand Crystyn I gyf not an hawe,  
To see hem hangyn or brent to me is very pleasauns,  
To dryvyn hem into doongeneys, dragonys to knawe,  
And to rende here flesche and bonys onto her sustenauns.”

<sup>28</sup> *Hist. Newcastle*, p. 378.

But the "Trial of Christ" with the interlude "Pilate's Wife's Dream," will perhaps give the best idea of these performances. I will, therefore, read some extracts from them with suitable comments to keep up the connection of the story.

The first stage direction in the Trial of Christ is this. "Here xal a massenger com into the place reunyng and crying" Tydynges ! Tydynges ! Jhesus of Nazareth is take ! Jhesus of Nazareth is take ! and forthwith heylyng the princes, thus—

"All heyle, my lordys, princes of prestys !  
Sere Cayphas and Sere Annas lordys of the lawe !  
Tydynges I brynge you, reseyyve them in your brestys,  
Jhesus of Nazareth is take, thereof ye may be faw,  
He xal be browth hedyr to you anon,  
I telle you trewly with a gret rowth,  
Whan he was take I was hem among  
And ther was I ner to kachyd a clowte.

Malcus bar a lanterne and put him in pres  
Anoon he had a towche, and of went his ere !  
Jhesus bad his dysciple put up his swerd and ces  
And set Malcus ere agegn as hool as it was ere."

After a little more of this, Christ is brought in and his captors exclaim—

"Lo ! lo ! Lordys, here is the man  
That ye sent us fore."

*Annas.*

"Therefore we cone you thanke than  
And reward ye xal have the more

Jhesus, thou are welcome hedyr to our presens  
Ful of tyn we han the bessly do sowth,  
We payd to thi dysciple, for the, thirty pens,  
And as an ox or an hos we trewly the bowth ;

Therfore nowast oure as thou standyst us before,  
 Say why thou ast trobelyd us and subvertyd oure  
 lawe,  
 Thou ast ofte concludyd us, and so thou hast do  
 more,  
 Wherfor it were ful nedful to bring the adawe."

Cayphas then enquires about his disciples and his doctrine.

Jhesus answers that he has done nothing secretly, and refers them to those who heard him.

*Primus Judeus.*

"What thou fela? to whom spekyst thou?  
 Xalt thou so speke to a busechop?  
 Thou xalt have on the cheke I make a vow  
 And get thereto a knock."

*(Smites Jesus.)*

The text now becomes mere paraphrase till Jesus admits himself to be the Son of God. Then Cayphas exclaims:—

"A! out! out! allas! What is this?  
 Heryth ye not how he blasfemyth God?  
 What nedyth us to have more wyttness?  
 Here ye have herd alle his owyn worde;  
 Thyнк ye not he is worthy to dey?"

*All exclaim:—*

"Yys! Yys! Yys! alle we seye he is worthy to dey  
 Ya! Ya! Ya!"

*Annas.*

"Takyth him to yow and betyth hym sone del,  
 Ffor hese blasfemyng at this sel."



Then follows the stage direction : “ Here thei xal bete Jhesus about the hed and the body, and spyttyn in his face and puttyn hym down and settyn hym on a stol and castyn a cloth over his face.” After this the judges abuse and mock him in alternating doggrel.

Next follows Peter’s denial and the cock crowing. This seems to have been a special feature of the play, as a considerable fee was sometimes paid to the crower.

Peter duly repents, and a messenger is sent to Pylat.

(“ Pylat is shewn sitting on his throne ; the messenger kneeleth to him and says ) :—

“ Al heyl ! Sere Pylat that semly is to se !  
 Prynce of al Juri and kepere of the lawe,  
 My lord busshop Cayphas comawndyd hym to the  
 And prayd the to be at the mot halle by the day dawe.”

*Pylat.*

“ Go thi way, praty masanger and comawnde me also  
 I xal be there in hast and so thou mayest say  
 Be the oure of prime I xal comyn hem to  
 I tery no lenger, no make no delay.”

The Messenger returns and delivers his report.

*Cayphas.*

“ Now weyl mote thou fare my good page  
 Take thou this (gives him money) for thi massage.”

Here Judas enters ; confesses his sin ; throws down the silver ; goes to the back of the stage and hangs himself.

This was done so realistically that on one occasion the performer actually strangled himself; the audience doubtless applauding the excellence of the poor wretch's acting.

Jhesus, having been led about the stage, is at last brought to Pylat's hall.

Pilate tries to save him, but the priests insist on his death. On which, learning that Jesus was born in Galilee, Pilate sends him to Herod, the king of that country.

Then the stage direction is :—

“Here thei take Jhesus and lede hym in gret hast to the Herowde; and the Herowdys scafald xal uncloze shewyng Herowdes in a stete, alle the Jewys knelyng except Annas and Cayphas, thei xal be stondyn.”

*Primus Doctor.*

“Heyl, Herowde, most excyllent Kyng,  
We am comawndyd to thine presens.  
Pylat sendyth the, bi us, gretyng,  
And chargyth us by our obedyens.”

*Secundus Doctor.*

“That we xuld do oure dylygens  
To bryng Jhesus of Nazareth unto the,  
And chargyth us to make no resystens,  
Because he was born in this countré.”

*Annas.*

“We know he hath wrowth gret folé  
Ageyns the lawe shewyd present;  
Therefore Pylat sent hym onto the  
That thou xuldyst gyf hym jugement.”

*Herowde Rex.*

“How, be Mahound, my God of Grace !  
 Of Pylat this is a dede ful kende !  
 I forgyf him now his gret trespace  
 And shall be his frend withowtyn ende,  
 Jhesus to me that he wole sende  
 I desyred ful sore hym for to se ;  
 Gret ese in this Pylat xal fynde,  
 And Jhesus, thou art welcome to me.”

The Jews and Caiaphas accuse Jesus. Herod answers that he has heard all these things before, and, addressing the prisoner, says :—

“Jhesus, thou art welcome to me,  
 I kan Pylat gret thank for his sendyng,  
 I have desyred ful longe the to se,  
 And of thi meracles to have knowing.”

He speaks at some length, but Jesus makes no answer.

*Herod.*

“Jhesus why spekyst not to thi kyng ?  
 What is the cawse thou standyst so styлле ?  
 Thou nowyst I may deme alle thyng.  
 Thyn lyf and deth lyth at my wylle,” etc., etc.

*Cayphas.*

“Loo ! Serys, this is of hym a false sotlylte,  
 He wyl not speke but whan he lyst !  
 Thus he dysceyvvyth the pepyl in eche degre  
 He is ful fals ye weryly tryst.”

*Rex Herowde.*

“What! thou onhanged harlot, why  
 Wyllt thou not speke?  
 Hast thou skorne to speke onto thi kyng?  
 Becawse thou dost oure lawys breke  
 I trowe thou art aferd of our talkyng.”

*Annas.*

“Nay, he is not aferde but of a fals wyle,  
 Becawse we xuld not hym acuse,  
 If that he answerd yow ontylle  
 He knowyth he can not hymself excuse.”

*Rex Herowde.*

“What? spek I say, thou foulyng! evyl mot thou fare,  
 Loke up! the devyl mote the cheke!  
 Seres, bete his body with scorges bere,  
 And asay to make hym for to speke.”

*Primus Judaeus.*

“It xal be do wythoutyn terying.  
 Come on, thou tretour; evyl mot thou the!  
 Wylt thou not speke onto oure kyng?  
 A new lesson we xal lere thee.”

(Here thei pulle of Jhesus clothes and betyn hym  
 with whyppys.)

*Secundus Judaeus.*

“Jhesus, thi bonys we xal not breke,  
 But we xal make the to skyppe,  
 Thou hast lost thi tongue, thou mayst not speke  
 Thou xalt asay now of this whippe.”

Tertius Judaeus speaks and acts in a similar manner, and when “he is all bloodye” Herod, after

abusing him, sends Jesus back to Pilate, and primus doctor undertakes to conduct him.

The stage direction here says: "Then enteryth Satan into the place in the most orryble wyse and gwyl that he pleyth they xal don on Jhesus clothis and overest a whyte clothe and ledyn him abouth the place, and to Pylat be the tym that his wyf hath played."

Apparently, then, there was a break in the play, occupied by an Interlude, during which Jesus was led about among the people to excite pity and to collect money. This Interlude was evidently a screaming farce. It was called *Pilate's Wife's Dream*, and, to appreciate it we must remember that, according to the custom of the times, the lady was in bed without a scrap of body clothing on her.

The Interlude begins with a soliloquy by Satan:—

"Thus I reyne as a roe<sup>29</sup> hand with a ryng gyng rowth,<sup>30</sup>  
As a devyl most dowty dred is my dynt  
Brennyng in flames as fyre out of flynt,  
Ho so serve me, Sathan, to sorwe is sent  
With dragonys in doungeyns and devyls fu derke  
In bras and in bronston the brothellys<sup>31</sup> be brent  
That went in this werd my wyl for to werk."

He next recounts the evil that Jesus has done to his cause, and how he has tempted him in vain, adding:—

"I have do make redy his cross that he xal dye upon  
And thre nayles to takke him with that he xal not styrt  
Be he nevyr so holy he xal not fro me gon  
But with a sharpe spere he xal be smet to the herte!"

<sup>29</sup> Roe—ruler.

<sup>30</sup> Rowth—suffer.

<sup>31</sup> Brethellys—wretches.

Satan then prophesies that Jesus shall come to Hell, and warns the demons to prepare for such a visit. One of them replies :

“Out upon the ! we conjure the  
That never in Helle we may hym se,  
Ffor ane he once in Helle be,  
He xal oure power brest.”

*Sathan.*

“A ! A ! than have I go to ferre ?  
But som wyle help. I have a shrewde torne !  
My game is wers than I wend here ;  
I may seyn my game is lorne.”

The poor self-deluded Devil, infinitely grotesque in his bewilderment, and profuse in his comic contortions when tormented by the harlequin tricks of the Vice, at last imagines that if he can but save the life of Jesus his kingdom may still be preserved, and, remembering the influence that ladies exercise in this world, he determines to incite Pilate's wife to avert the threatened catastrophe.

The stage direction is :—

“Here xal the devyl gon to Pylatys wyf, the corteyn drawyn as she lyth in bedde ; and he shall no dene make ; but she xal sone after that he is come in, makyn a rewly noyse commyng and rennyng of the schaffald, and her shert and here kyrtyl in here hand, and sche xal come beforn Pylat like a mad woman, saying

“ Pylat I charge thee that thou take hede,  
 Dome not Jhesu, but be his frend  
 Yyf thou jewge hym to be dede  
 Thou art dampnyd withouty mende,  
 A fend aperyd me beforne,  
 As I lay in bed slepyng fast!  
 Sythyn the tyme that I was born  
 Was I nevyr so sore aghast.

“ As wylde fyre and thondyr blast  
 He came cryeng onto me!  
 He seyde, thei that bete Jesu or bownde him fast  
 Withoutyn ende dampnyd xal be.”

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Pylat, though evidently annoyed at her intrusion, replies courteously :

“ Gramercy, myn wyf, for evyr ye be trewe,  
 Your cowncel is good and evyr hath be,  
 Now to your chawmer ye do sewe,  
 And all xal be weyl, dame, as ye xal se.”

By this time the new stage is in place, and, the old one being removed, a fresh company begins the next act, the “Condemnation of Christ.”

It is evident that the stage on which such performances were given must have been a very elaborate structure with many mechanical appliances for producing scenic effects. This was a vast improvement on the primitive arrangements of the monks.

We must also not forget that the Coventry plays which have come down to us are not the original texts, but amended editions with the characters more distinctly marked and their parts modernised. We may therefore regard them as the drama in its traditional



state, many traces of the orthodox paraphrase still remaining, but now largely interspersed with the conceptions of aspiring authors.

Time does not permit me to do more than just mention the Cornish, Wakefield, Hull, and other plays, but a good deal of interesting matter concerning them is to be found in the various records, and anyone who cares to pursue the study will be amply rewarded for his pains. In the present paper, too, I have only given a general sketch of these dramas as a whole without attempting a minute critical examination of any of them. I can only say that their linguistic characteristics are very peculiar and exceedingly interesting, as for the most part they are written in the local dialect, and so offer a rare treat to philologists.

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## THE LAKE SCHOOL, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH POETRY.

BY R. A. DOUGLAS LITHGOW, M.D., LL.D., F.S.A., ETC.

IN dealing particularly with any period of literary history it is, I think, in the first place, desirable to consider, at least in its broader outlines, that which preceded it; as we are thus better enabled to estimate not only the developmental influences which have evolved its production, but also the causes of which such development is the result. In briefly considering therefore the Lake Poets and their influence on English poetry, I shall glance backward for a moment to the so-called Classical School which the Lake Poets superseded, and against which the latter so vigorously protested.

The germs of Classicism in our literature may be said to have been introduced during the glorious Elizabethan era, during which the discovery of printing, and the consequent diffusion of the Greek and Roman classics, and the works of Italian and French writers, by means of translations, not only excited a general taste for elegant reading, but exerted the genial influences of literature upon a class of readers who had never previously been subject to them. England, however, was late in

cultivating classical learning, as English literature was slower still in yielding to classical influences. The great stream of Elizabethan literature gushed forth from a native source, and with such power that it resisted the influence of the classics even after they had begun to be studied in England.

The classical revolution, however, which ultimately gained such an ascendancy in English versification, having aimed at the simplicity, fitness, and perspicuity which characterised the classical writers, certainly produced a general refinement and polish of thought and language, and was the means of neutralising the exaggerated and excessive condensation of thought, and of banishing those far-fetched images and wild personifications of Nature which had distinguished the immediately preceding period. But the effort to acquire these benefits necessitated the declension of English literature in Nature and truth. As a writer says :—"Attention was drawn away from the realities of life and Nature to the nice congruities and harmonies of thought and expression. The language of the heart was lost in the roll of harmonious verse, and the real aspects of the world were disguised by the false colouring of merely conventional imagery."<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Waller may be said to have founded the Classical School, which Denham, Dryden, and Pope did so much to cultivate afterwards, but the polished and eclectic elegance at which they aimed degenerated into time-serving sarcastic maxims, and a meek philosophic didacticism, confined within the bounds of couplets dreary in their regularity, unimaginative,

<sup>1</sup> Anon.

precise, stilted, prosaic, and pedantic, until the period which they initiated, and which, as they thought, comprised all that deserved the name of English poetry, came to be excluded down to the time of Cowper as a great hiatus in the development of English verse.

That part of the eighteenth century in England between 1727 and 1780 formed the period of the followers and imitators of Waller, Denham, Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Addison. It is generally the case in literature that an age of original writing is followed by one of mere repetition, which often, in untalented hands, sinks into servile imitation and exaggeration of, perhaps, the weaknesses of the masters, or of the outward expression without the spirit of their works. So, indeed, it was in the literature of England in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was altogether an artificial age; nothing natural was allowed to appear. The gardens of those days are examples of the prevailing taste in their formality and preciseness. Even the great trees must not be allowed to grow as they would, but must be cut into formal and fantastic shapes, In architecture, in dress, and in poetry, the same fashion prevailed. The characters, either painted or written about, all wear the prescribed dress of the time, and even the ancients introduced into *their* literature seem to have the stiffness and unnaturalness of the Court of the first two Georges. The poets devoted themselves to refining upon the style of Pope and his contemporaries; the artificial manners of the people were their most fertile subjects, and the delicately-finished compositions, after the

pattern of those of Queen Anne, were the only styles that pleased the fastidious ears of their fashionable critics. In some cases it had reached to a pitch of absurdity, when it was considered a great merit to raise a low subject by overlaying it with poetical language, and to express the most commonplace things in words that would have suited a great heroic poem.

Men's minds at length grew weary of this constant reproduction of the same style, and, after 1780, there arose a new race of poets who were animated with a spirit of reform similar to that which was actuating men in the social and political world.

There is always a connection between stirring times in the history of a country and the literature then produced. It was natural, therefore, that the overthrow of all old forms in the revolution that was convulsing France in government and in society, should bring to pass a corresponding result in literature. The reforms spread to our own country, and the old affectations could no longer be endured. The passions of men had been stirred to their depths, and poetry must be fired with some of their own spirit, for the outward artificial manners, and the description of them, had now no charm. Poets had begun to see the grandeur and sublimity of Nature, and to feel the effects of it in their souls, and no elaborate descriptions of garden scenes whence everything natural was excluded could now employ their muse.

A real poetic imagination was beginning to appear which must find expression in verse, and its truth was to stand in the stead of the old technical

system of versification, which had a beautiful form outwardly, but was wanting in any fervour or true poetry.

Cowper and Burns began their great reform in Great Britain, and the three Lake poets, and among them especially Wordsworth, set themselves earnestly to carry it out further.

What a curious study it is to compare a description of Nature in Pope and in Cowper—one of the first to really love her among modern poets—will be seen in contrasting the two following descriptions :—

“ As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night !  
 O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light ;  
 When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,  
 And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene ;  
 Around her throne the vivid planets roll,  
 And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole ;  
 O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed  
 And tip with silver every mountain's head ;  
 Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,  
 A flood of glory bursts from all the skies ;  
 The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,  
 Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.”

The foregoing quotation is from Pope's translation of the eighth book of the *Iliad*, and may be accepted as a fair example of his melodious versification, and his false and contradictory imagery. Cowper's translation of the same scene, although by no means showing him at his best, is, at least, appropriate, and will serve, by way of contrast, to manifest his vividness, distinctness, and truth to Nature :—

“As when around the clear, bright moon, the stars  
Shine in full splendour, and the winds are hushed,  
The groves, the mountain-tops, the headland heights  
Stand all apparent ; not a vapour streaks  
The boundless blue, but ether opened wide  
All glitters, and the shepherd’s heart is cheered.”

Cowper in England and Burns in Scotland were the two poets who, recognising the true mission of poetry, viz., to act as the high interpreter of Nature, made her forget the plaything she had been in the days of the Restoration and long afterwards, and upreared her as a priestess in Nature’s innermost temple. Their gifted souls found nothing exalted, beneficent, or humanising in the jingling sweetness of their predecessors, no kinship with, no knowledge of, no appreciation for Nature in her every mood, and thus they determined to awake the world to the true power and purpose of poetry and her votaries.

The lessons which they taught, the principles which they inculcated, took deep and abiding root in the hearts and minds of three gifted friends, viz., Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who ultimately founded the so-called Lake School, and dedicated their lives to the promulgation and establishment of the principles initiated by Cowper and Burns. The tenets of the new school drew down upon their upholders all the ridicule and hostility that the critical world had at its command ; but they struggled on bravely and unflinchingly through it, as true genius merely recognises opposition or difficulties in order to overcome them. On Wordsworth’s verse especially did the weight of unfair



criticism fall, but his friend Coleridge resisted every attack made upon his master, and the judgment of posterity is more likely to agree with his opinion and with the warmth of his praise, than with the censure of his opponents. That there was, however, some truth in these adverse criticisms cannot be denied, and they may be mainly attributed to the fact that the poet was at first misunderstood owing to his simplicity and total want of the sense of humour, or, still more broadly, because his art was so great that he concealed it with the utmost care.

In their youth Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey had each been warm supporters of the French Revolution, and exhibited such a love of humanity, French democracy, and expansion of mind and liberty, as enraged not only the old Tory school of politics, but outraged the susceptibilities of the English critics who, in return, exposed them to hatred and ridicule, and dubbed them as the "Cockney School," the "Lakers," and the "Lake School." In later years, however, their republicanism vanished, and they became disciples of the very opposite school in politics. Wordsworth had settled at Rydal Mount, happy in the solitude and in the beauty of the scenery which he loved so much. After a time Coleridge and Southey were attracted to the same neighbourhood, and hence the name of the "Lake Poets," originally applied to them in derision, became an appellation dear to all lovers of poetry and to all classes of their fellow-countrymen.

Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth in April, 1770. In his ninth year he was sent to the grammar school at Hawkshead, where he remained until about

his eighteenth year. In 1787 he was entered at St. John's College, Cambridge (and I am sure we are all proud to have the honoured Master of this illustrious College presiding over us to-day), but during the four sessions he was there he in no way distinguished himself, being more partial to the poets than the schoolmen. In 1790 he visited France with a fellow student, and in the following year took his degree. In 1793 he published *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, and although these fell dead from the press, yet they elicited the admiration of the few men who recognised the genius of the author, amongst whom Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarked concerning these poems that "Seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetical genius above the literary horizon more evidently-announced."

In 1795 Wordsworth and his sister took a cottage near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire, but in order to be near Coleridge, they removed to Alfoxden, in Somersetshire, in 1797. At Crewkerne Wordsworth wrote his *Salisbury Plain*, and the tragedy of *The Borderers*, and at Alfoxden he and Coleridge composed the *Lyrical Ballads*, which were published by the celebrated Joseph Cottle, of Bristol. This volume, however, was very little, if any more successful than the first one, but the two friends were in no way discouraged or disheartened by the absence of public appreciation. In 1796 and 1799 they travelled together in Germany, and in the latter year Wordsworth took up his residence at Grasmere, in the neighbourhood of which he spent the remainder of his life.

A second and enlarged edition of *Lyrical Ballads*

appeared in 1800, in two volumes, and a third and fourth edition respectively in 1802 and 1805.

In 1802 Wordsworth married his cousin, Mary Hutchinson, by whom he had five children. In 1808 he again changed his residence to Allan Bank, and finally, in 1813, he removed to Rydal Mount, in the same district.

Between 1807 and 1818 he published most of his best known works, but to even enumerate these now would take more space than the exigencies of time will permit. He subsequently classified and published all his poems in six volumes, and after the death of his friend Southey, in 1843, the laureate's crown was made greener by adorning his noble brow. His honour and purity of character increasing with his years, he at length died at Rydal Mount in 1850, at the advanced age of eighty years.

A writer<sup>2</sup> has well said : "During the whole of a long life this poet devoted himself most sedulously to three things : the worship of God *through Nature*, the cultivation of that genius that God had given him, and the proper cultivation of self. Hence he is an author very healthy and wholesome to contemplate. He sets himself to one steady purpose, never looks away from it, bends not to Courts, nor to popularity, nor to power, nor to riches. He lives among the Cumberland lakes a poor man, thinking the mountain, the sky, or a common field flower a grander subject of contemplation than a bag of gold. He publishes his poems, and critics laugh at them. They call them childish, and the author silly ; and yet, unheeding them, he still lives under the habitual sway of Nature,

<sup>2</sup> *Essays on English Writers*, 1869.

and urges that the effect of Nature and her contemplation exalt the soul to thoughts that live, while meaner worldly glories die away."

Wordsworth had faith in his belief, and he continued to worship Nature, worshipping the true and beautiful wherever found—on hill or mountain, in dale or valley, in earth, sky, or sea, by the murmuring brook, or in the flowery hedge-row—in the heart or mind of the merest hind, as in the heart or mind of the most illustrious. As he says himself, "Nature never did betray the heart that worshipped her"; and so he lived and died in this pure and simple faith, leaving the world far happier and better in that he had lived, and how much all who love our English literature are indebted to him we shall see presently, when we come to estimate the power and purpose of his life work.

Of the three poets, Coleridge was the most imaginative. His intellect was seemingly capable of doing anything, from the wide range of subjects it embraced, and the magnificent fragments of work that he has left. His genius was, however, clouded by the effects of opium-eating, a habit into which he had fallen, and of which he was not able to cure himself till late in life. This and a restless way of living for many years, prevented his finishing some of his greatest works, and only from the beauties of the fragments can we surmise what the whole might have been. The great beauty of his mind was the simplicity of its religious earnest search after truth, even when he had been led into erroneous opinions. Its great defect was a want of energetic will. He had a lively, original, imaginative genius, and a great purity of

feeling in his style. He was admired and imitated by his contemporaries, and the phraseology and melody of his verses have often echoed in the strains of later poets.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born at Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire, in 1772. From his eighth to his fourteenth year he was a day-dreamer, finding no allurements in either the sports or games of his school-fellows, and when eighteen he had imbibed so much learning as to constitute him a veritable walking encyclopædia. Had his determination of character been commensurate with his grasp of mind there is no position to which he might not have attained. In his youth he became a Deist—afterwards enlisted as a dragoon—became a Unitarian Minister, gave up Deism, and ultimately became, by a process of elaborate reasoning, a confirmed Trinitarian, and a pillar of the Church, opposed alike to Romanism and Free-thought.

Then he followed literature as a profession, gave lectures on the English dramatists and poets—wrote metaphysical essays—translated Schiller's *Wallenstein*, published *The Statesman's Manual*, *Aids to Reflection*, *Biographia Literaria*, edited a newspaper, devised literary reviews, published his poems, yet withal met with little pecuniary return; and finally resided with his friend Mr. Gillman, at Highgate Grove, where surrounded by those who appreciated his immense talents and genius, and his unrivalled powers as an inspired talker, he ultimately died in 1834.

The remaining unit of the great Lake trio, Robert Southey, was perhaps the most indefatigable worker in the whole range of literary history, having pub-

lished over one hundred volumes of poems, history, travels, &c., in addition to one hundred and twenty-six important Papers upon politics, history, biography, and general literature.

With regard to his poetry, he indubitably lacked, in some degree, the divine gift which so distinguished his friends Wordsworth and Coleridge, and thus his poems display not so much creative genius as the rewards of toil and thought; not so much the golden fruit which has sprung from a rich native soil, as that which has resulted from artificial cultivation; not so much the glow of originality as the less resplendent glimmer of laborious imitation.

Southey was born at Bristol in 1774, and in 1792 was dismissed from Westminster School for writing a sarcastic attack upon corporal punishment as then practised at the school. He entered Balliol College, Oxford, with the intention of taking orders, but, like his friend Coleridge, he too became a sceptic in religious matters, so that the pursuit was abandoned.

A year after leaving Oxford he made the acquaintance of Coleridge, and subsequently the two poets were married to two sisters on the same day. He sold his poem of *Joan of Arc* for fifty guineas, and for a time supported himself by giving historical lectures in his native place. Then his uncle took him with him to Spain and Portugal, where he remained six months, the result of his visit being the publication of *Letters from Spain and Portugal*, in 1796.

He afterwards became a law student, but ultimately abandoned all thought of the legal profession; published *Madoc*—again visited Lisbon—became



private Secretary to the Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer, which he soon relinquished, and from 1801 he dates his entrance upon literature as a profession. In 1804 he took up his residence at Greta Hall, Keswick, where he spent the remainder of his life. In 1807 he was pensioned by the Government, became Poet-Laureate in 1813, received a further Government pension of £300 a year, and was offered a Baronetcy, which he, however, declined. His first wife died in 1837, and he afterwards married Miss Caroline Bowles, the poetess, in 1839. Unfortunately, for some years before his death, which happened in 1843, his overtaxed faculties gave way beneath the excessive mental strain to which they had been subjected; and thus passed away a great and good man whose name will live in the literature of his country which he so much enriched.

In estimating the genius of such a poet as Wordsworth, and in making a critical analysis of his work, however brief, we should, in the first place, I think, regard the individuality of the man, and the aims and motives of his work. As he says himself, in one of his prefaces, "The principal object proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly, though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature. Humble and rustic life



was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language, because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated, because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Simplicity, earnestness, and truthfulness therefore characterise his aims, and these joined to a characteristic piety and nobleness of purpose, with a rapturous love for Nature in her every mood, and a beneficent interest in humanity constitute the gospel which he preaches. I very much question whether, in the whole range of literature, any other poet has more essentially possessed what I may term the poetic temperament than William Wordsworth. From his earliest youth poetry alone solaced the desires of his soul, and thrilled and permeated him through every hour of his long life.

Self-consciously inspired by God to be a priest in the vast temple of Nature, he gave himself up to her service, and whilst worshipping God's goodness and power, as manifested through her, he none the less reveres the divinity of soul and inner worth of mankind. He recognises no merit in rank or mere

position, no essential differences between men except in point of virtue or worthiness, and pays his homage to the beautiful and true in human nature, whether in king or subject, in peer or peasant.

During his long life—so pure, and sweet, and child-like, the sole desire of his being is to teach his fellow-creatures the faith that is in him through the divine medium of poetry, to elevate and ennoble them by directing their hearts and minds to the worship of God through Nature, and to the power and purpose of existence itself. This is the object to which he devotes himself, without faltering or flattering, and plods on steadily and steadfastly, looking neither to one side nor the other, unmindful alike of Court or camp, of rank or riches, of power or popularity.

The character of his poetry is as pure as was his own life—the life “of him that uttered nothing base,”—and from first to last it appeals to everything that is high and holy in man, and is everywhere directed towards those surroundings of his which are pure and useful, elevating, and ennobling.

Wordsworth was a voluminous and most industrious writer, and, during more than half of the eighty years of his life, he produced poetry of every class and variety. Although he took infinite pains with his work, and tried to make it as perfect as possible by processes of correction and polishing, yet I must own that much of what he has written is unworthy of his genius at its best, so simple as to be almost puerile, so prosaic as scarcely to merit the name of poetry at all.

That he was always anxious, however, not to

publish anything until he had made every effort to have it as flawless as could be will appear from a quotation from a dedicatory letter to his friend Southey, prefixed to his poem of *Peter Bell*. He says: "Pains have been taken . . . . to fit it for filling permanently a station, however humble, in the literature of our country. This has, indeed, been the aim of all my endeavours in poetry, which, you know, have been sufficiently laborious to prove that I deem the art not lightly to be approached."

We can only account for the prosaic quality of much that he has written by recollecting that it was his aim to choose and describe incidents from common life, and to use only the common language instead of the ornamental diction previously used in verse, and that it was this desire which led him astray, sometimes into the exceeding homeliness of both subject and language which is found in some of his lyrical ballads. When a poet speaks of a subject that has touched his heart, however simple it may be, and expresses it in the natural language which his cultivated and refined taste suggests, it will find its way to the hearts of his readers; but if the poet takes a subject which is too puerile to touch him, and invests it with poetic beauties foreign to it, it loses its truth of nature and fails in giving interest or pleasure. Thus, in *The Tables Turned* we find in one verse a kind of doggerel rhyme fit, perhaps, for the mouth it is put into, and in another one all the grace and poetry of a refined, accomplished writer, and of a tender, thoughtful mind. It seems, indeed, strange that the same mind would write in one poem the verse that drew down Byron's sharp ridicule:—

“Up! Up! my friend, and quit your books,  
 Or surely you'll grow double;  
 Up! Up! my friend, and clear your looks,  
 Why all this toil and trouble?”

And the following :—

“One impulse from a vernal wood  
 May teach you more of man,  
 Of moral evil and of good  
 Than all the sages can.”

The same simplicity of expression is also seen in the poem entitled *Lucy*, but surely in the following lines there is a gentle pathos which touches the heart, and when sympathetically appreciated leaves a sense of desolation :—

“She lived unknown; and few could know  
 When Lucy ceased to be;  
 But she is in her grave; and oh,  
 The difference to me!”

On the other hand, perhaps, no other preceding poet had the same marvellous capacity for crystallising “thoughts that breathe, and words that burn,” into a single line or couplet. Take the following examples selected almost at random :—

“The child is father to the man.”

“To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

The following again from his sonnet to Milton :—

“Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;  
 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,  
 Pure as the naked heavens—majestic, free.”

What could be more full of pathos, simplicity, and

delicate fancy than some of his minor pieces—"the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses" of the great Gothic church that he was to rear in *The Recluse*? In all these we may find, in Wordsworth's own words:—

"The gleam,  
The light that never was on sea or land;  
The consecration, and the poet's dream."

One distinguishing feature of Wordsworth's poetry is the meditative calm that pervades it, a kind of reaction from the strife and tumult of the French Revolution which had attracted his youth. Whatever was simple and permanent he valued and loved, whatever was noisy and clamorous he disliked and repudiated.

Wordsworth's poetry at his best is equal to any in our language. No other poet has so nearly attained to the sublimity of Milton in his sonnets, and as has been well said: "His ode on the *Intimations of Immortality* is simply the very finest piece of its kind that ever was written or will be written. It is unsurpassed and unsurpassable."

What can be finer, for example, than the following verse from this exquisitely beautiful poem?—

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar;  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy !  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
     Upon the growing boy,  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows ;  
     He sees it in his joy ;  
 The youth, who daily farther from the east  
     Must travel, still is Nature's priest,  
     And by the vision splendid,  
     Is on his way attended ;  
 At length the man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day."

In his great poem, *The Excursion*, forming the back-bone of the grand work he proposed, under the title of *The Recluse*, the thought may sometimes be obscure and difficult to follow, but the beautiful pictures of Nature, of humble virtue, and the constant all-pervading religious fervour can never fail to give pleasure or to sway the heart of the appreciative reader with a feeling almost akin to divineness.

I very much question whether a finer moral and meditative poem was ever written.

How willingly I would linger amid

    "This feast of nectar'd sweets,  
     Where no crude surfeit reigns."

But to do anything like justice to the heaven-hallowed poetry of Wordsworth is simply impossible within the limits of such a Paper as the present. I cannot, however, resist the temptation to quote the following lines, "Written near Tintern Abbey":—

    "I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,



Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :  
A motion and a spirit which impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods  
And mountains ; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth ; of all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear, both what they half create,  
And what perceive : well pleased to recognise  
In Nature, and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being."

I conclude this cursory and very brief analysis of Wordsworth's poetry by quoting the following estimate of his genius from the pen of Mr. Algernon Swinburne :—"The incommunicable, the immitigable might of Wordsworth, when the god has indeed fallen on him, cannot but be felt by all, and can but be felt by any ; none can partake and catch it up. There are many men greater than he ; there are men much greater ; but what he has of greatness is his only. His concentration, his majesty, his pathos, have no parallel : some have gone higher, many lower ; none have touched precisely the same point as he."

The collected poems of Coleridge have been published in three volumes, which contain much that is dear to every lover of English poetry. His was, indeed, a many-sided genius, like a precious stone on which the hand of Nature had cut and polished many facets, but which earth and time had blurred in the



using and spoiled with accidental flaws. Whilst the range of his knowledge was cyclopædic, his intellect Titanic in its power, and capable of adding lustre to all realms of thought, alas! he inherited with his humanity a want of concentration and steadiness of purpose, a mental bias which warped and made him in some sense unworthy of the intellectual riches with which he was dowered. Hence, while some of his work is of the highest order, whether metaphysical, critical, or imaginative, it is nearly all fragmentary and somewhat inconsecutive, indicative of innate power, rather than of the achievement of great results.

His imaginative works, various in style and manner, consist of "ode, tragedy, and epigram—love-poems, and strains of patriotism and superstition—a wild witchery of imagination, and, at other times, severe and stately thought and intellectual retrospection. His language is often rich and musical, highly figurative and ornate, and many of his minor poems are characterised by tenderness and beauty."<sup>3</sup>

The incompleteness of his great designs, owing to his constitutional infirmity of purpose (rendered all the more galling by his ambitious promptings to excel in some great work)—the feeling that instead of using his great talents profitably he had, to use his own expression, wasted "the prime and manhood of his intellect," brought to the poet often great sorrow and heart-rending remorse. This will be seen in the following beautiful and pathetic lines addressed to Wordsworth after hearing the latter

<sup>3</sup> *Cyclop. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. II, p. 72 (1876).

recite a poem "On the growth of an individual mind":—

"Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,  
The pulses of my being beat anew;  
And even as life returns upon the drowned,  
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains,  
Keen pangs of love, awakening as a babe  
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;  
And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of hope;  
And hope that scarce would know itself from fear;  
Sense of past youth and manhood come in vain;  
And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;  
And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,  
And all which patient toil had reared, and all  
Commune with thee had opened out; but flowers  
Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,  
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave."

Notwithstanding the capacity and subtlety of his intellect, his morbidly transcendental and dreamy imagination, which delighted in the supernatural, and the vigour of his mental activity, yet the weaknesses of his Nature rendered his best efforts incomplete and intermittent. I have to deal only with his poetry, but he was more than a poet, for his metaphysical powers were of the highest order, and he was, perhaps, the most brilliant conversationalist of the century. Indeed, he had always a difficulty in expressing himself in writing, but he was entirely in his element when he could pour forth with lavish and inexhaustible flow the vast range of knowledge and learning which he had acquired. This marvellous conversational gift joined to a fine sense of humour, a sharp and ready wit, and critical acumen of sur-

passing excellence, made him one of the most remarkable men of his time.

His poetry is chiefly celebrated for the exquisite melody of the versification, which enchains the ear by its music, for the tenderness and delicacy of its sentiment, for the spirituality of its imagination, and for the harmonious colouring of his descriptions and their truth to Nature.

His *Ode to France*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Genevieve*, *Youth and Age*, and the *Ode to the Departing Year*, are not only unsurpassed by any similar productions in our language, but are by far the most original, the most purely poetical pieces produced during this century.

As a writer says: "Beyond the mere mechanical and musical beauty of the verse, there is a deep hidden meaning, a satisfying fancy, a pure and holy conception, that makes one at once acknowledge a true poet "with his singing robes about him," one not content to wait in the outer courts of fancy, or to ornament himself with the mere prettinesses of rhyme, like the fashionable writers of the eighteenth century, but who penetrated at once into the Adytum, and stood in the presence of God."<sup>4</sup>

I have neither the time nor inclination to mar the beauties of the poems which I have mentioned by any mere quotation, but as illustrating how his high art was informed by loftier genius, I quote the following lines from his *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni*:—

<sup>4</sup> *Essays on English Writers* (1869), p. 337.

"Hast thou a charm to stay the morning star  
 In his steep course ? So long he seems to pause  
 On thy bald, awful head, O sovran Blanc !  
 The Arvé and Arveiron at thy base  
 Rave ceaselessly ! but thou, most awful form !  
 Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines  
 How silently ! Around thee and above  
 Deep is the air, and dark, substantial, black,  
 An ebon mass ; methinks thou piercest it  
 As with a wedge ! But when I look again  
 It is thine own calm home, thy crystal shrine,  
 Thy habitation from eternity !  
 O dread and silent mount ! I gazed upon thee  
 Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,  
 Didst vanish from my thought : entranced in prayer,  
 I worshipped the Invisible alone !"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thou first and chief, sole sovran of the vale !  
 Oh ! struggling with the darkness all the night,  
 And visited all night by troops of stars,  
 Or when they climb the sky, or when they sink !  
 Companion of the morning star at dawn,  
 Thyself earth's rosy star, and of the dawn  
 Co-herald ! Wake, O wake, and utter praise  
 Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in earth ?  
 Who filled thy countenance with rosy light ?  
 Who made thee parent of perpetual streams ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Thou too, hoar mount, with thy sky-pointing peaks,  
 Oft from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,  
 Shoots downward, glittering through the pure serene,  
 Into the depth of clouds that veil thy breast,  
 Thou too, again, stupendous mountain ! thou  
 That, as I raise my head, awhile bowed low  
 In adoration, upward from thy base  
 Slow travelling with dim eyes, suffused with tears,

Solemnly seemest like a vapoury cloud  
 To rise before me. Rise, oh, ever rise ;  
 Rise like a cloud of incense from the earth !  
 Thou kingly spirit throned among the hills,  
 Thou dread ambassador from earth to heaven,  
 Great hierarch ! tell thou the silent sky,  
 And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun,  
 Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God !”

Southey, the third of this poetical triumvirate, dates his entrance upon literature as a profession in 1801, but he had published several works previous to this date, including his *Joan of Arc*, which he had sold to Cottle, the Bristol bookseller. In 1804 he settled down at Greta Hall, near Keswick, and from that time his library was the only world he lived in. As he says himself :—

“ My days among the dead are passed ;  
 Around me I behold,  
 Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
 The mighty minds of old ;  
 My never-failing friends are they,  
 With whom I converse night and day.”

Here he devoted his time entirely to literature, and every day and hour had its appropriate and select task. “ His dearly-prized books,” says his son, “ were a pleasure to him almost to the end, and he would walk slowly round his library looking at them and taking them down mechanically.” It is melancholy to think of this great, gifted, and good man spending the last three years of his life in utter and hopeless vacuity of intellect, yet loving to linger amongst, and to touch and handle his beloved friends—his books—almost until his death !

Both in prose and poetry Southey was the most fertile and voluminous writer of this century, but he never attained to great popularity, owing to the subjects which he chose and his manner of treating them, his subjects being too wild and supernatural, and his images and descriptions, although gorgeous and sublime, being "too remote, too fanciful, and often too learned."

His best known poetical works are *Thalaba, the Destroyer*, *Madoc*, *The Curse of Kehama*, and *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*; but some of his youthful ballads, such as *Lord William*, *Mary, the Maid of the Inn*, *The Well of St. Keyne*, *The Battle of Blenheim*, and the *Holly-Tree*, were extremely popular, and the delight of most young readers when they were written.

In most of his poems he is alike original in his language and his style. He chooses his characters, as in *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama*, from beings almost on the verge of the supernatural, and leads them through scenes of more than earthly terror or beauty. His language is sometimes wearisome from its very eloquence and grandeur; it now and again obscures the thought it was meant to express, and inclines to the fault which, perhaps, characterises our modern poetry too much, viz., the "efflorescence of mere language." In *Thalaba* he uses a style of verse quite of his own invention, which consists of an unrhymed lyrical stanza, possessing a peculiar charm and rhythmical harmony, which adds greatly to the effect of the descriptions.

*The Curse of Kehama* is in rhyme, but otherwise resembles *Thalaba* in character and structure. The



story is founded upon the Hindu mythology, and has for its hero a Hindu Rajah who acquires and exercises supernatural power like Dr. Faustus. The vividness of the scene portraiture in this splendid poem is only equalled by its marvellous originality, and the brilliancy and richness of the imagination which it reveals. The pictures have all the florid colouring of the oriental scenes which they depict, and alike in habits and manners, modes of thought, costume, and descriptiveness, the poem is perfectly and consistently oriental. *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*, a truly magnificent poem overflowing with genuine pathos, almost palls upon the reader on account of its ornate and gorgeous diction, and the redundancy of its word-painting, but it contains also many beauties of style and expression—much truthfulness to Nature—a subtle delicacy of refined feeling, and many king-thoughts crystallised in imperishable poetry.

Time alas ! will only permit me to quote two brief extracts—the first from the opening stanzas of *Thalaba*, descriptive of a widowed mother wandering over the eastern desert during the silence of night :—

“ How beautiful is Night !  
 A dewy freshness fills the silent air ;  
 No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,  
     Breaks the serene of heaven :  
 In full-orbed glory, yonder moon divine  
 Rolls through the dark blue depths.  
     Beneath her steady way  
     The desert circle spreads,  
 Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.  
     How beautiful is Night ! ”



My second brief extract is from the *The Curse of Kehama*, and is an apostrophe to Love.

“ They sin who tell us Love can die,  
With life all other passions fly,  
All others are but vanity.  
In Heaven Ambition cannot dwell,  
Nor Avarice in the vaults of hell ;  
Earthly these passions of the earth,  
They perish where they had their birth,  
But Love is indestructible :  
Its holy flame for ever burneth,  
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.  
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,  
At times deceived, at times oppressed,  
It here is tried and purified,  
Then hath in heaven its perfect rest :  
It soweth here with toil and care,  
But the harvest-time of Love is there.  
Oh ! when a mother meets on high  
The babe she lost in infancy,  
Hath she not then, for pains and fears,  
The day of woe, the watchful night,  
For all her sorrows, all her tears  
An over-payment of delight ? ”

Comparing Southey with Wordsworth and Coleridge it must be admitted that he was dowered with the divine gift of poesy in a less liberal measure than his two illustrious friends, but the admirable poetic diction, the fine descriptive power, and the rich, glowing imagery which characterise the majority of his poetic works fully entitle him to be included in that brilliant and exalted trio to which English poetry is so deeply indebted.

Such were the poets of the so-called Lake School

Let me now briefly seek to inquire as to the influence they exerted on English poetry. We have already seen that the so-called poets of the eighteenth century, although, for the most part, able and accomplished men, possessed little if any creative imagination, and thus regarded the essential attributes of poetry as consisting of metre, and "a certain peculiar and artificial phraseology called poetic diction."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the principal authorities in literary history are almost unanimous in regarding the period from the time of Dryden to about the year 1800 as an era of poetic sterility in England, characterised by cleverness, conceit, and poverty. Almost simultaneously with the promulgation of the Transcendental Philosophy in Germany, and the action of those social and political forces that culminated in the French Revolution, as already stated, a new spirit arose in Britain—a sudden manifestation of long-repressed energy, in a word, a protest against—a reaction and an awakening from the previous period of poetical degeneracy. Cowper and Crabbe in England, and Burns in Scotland, first felt the influence of this mental quickening, and sympathising with it, carried forward the process of reformation until every hamlet in Britain had become instinct and pregnant with the newly-rekindled poetic fire.

To these succeeded Wordsworth, and to him beyond doubt is mainly due the renaissance of English poetical literature in the present century. In the grasp of illustrious men, associated with him, more or less, in this re-creation of English poetry, I may

<sup>5</sup> Professor Masson, *Essays*, &c., p. 16.

mention Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Southey, but he was undoubtedly the leader, as he may also be regarded as the father of a new poetical era.

He regarded poetry as something holy, and himself as set apart as a ministering servant of God and Nature. Indeed, poetry with him was a service of devotion. "Never, perhaps, in the whole range of literary history, from Homer downwards, did any individual throughout the course of a long life, dedicate himself to poetry with a devotion so pure, so perfect, and so uninterrupted as he did. It was not his amusement, his recreation, his mere pleasure. It was the main, the serious, the solemn business of his being. It was his morning, noon, and evening thought, the object of his outdoor rambles, the subject of his indoor reflections; and, as an art, he studied it as severely as ever Canova did sculpture, or Michael Angelo painting.<sup>6</sup> As he said himself in a letter to Sir George Beaumont: "The poet is a teacher. I wish to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing"; and in all literature no one approaches him in his sense of dignity as a poet. What then did he teach us? How did his teaching influence our poetry? In reply to the first question it may be broadly stated that he interpreted Nature, and Man in relation to Nature. He recognised the fact that Nature had a revelation to impart; he strove with all the powers of his being to induce man to receive this revelation, and to this work he dedicated his life. In his interpretation of Nature he simply described what he saw as he saw it, but, in regarding

<sup>6</sup> Dr. D. M. Moir, *Poet. Lit. of Last Half Century*, p. 65.

an object, he sought not only to see its meaning and significance, but also to find out the open secrets which lay at the heart of every common thing in Nature, by looking at them with a spiritual eye, which penetrated into their very core. In a word, every natural object revealed a soul to him, which was vitally related to the soul of every other natural object, and all formed part of the great soul of the universe. "The highest life of each separate object having thus an interior relation to the life of every other, there is reciprocity amongst them all, a never-ceasing inter-communion as the common element ebbs and flows throughout them."<sup>7</sup> As Mr. Stopford Brooke says: "This idea is the loveliest of all which Wordsworth has introduced into English poetry, and it flowed from his conception of everything in Nature having its own peculiar life. . . . There was ceaseless inter-communion founded on the unutterable love which flowed through all things, and with which everything acted on every other. The whole world was linked together; every part, every element, gave and received, honoured and did service, to each other. . . . And they delight in social intercourse like friends who love each other; there is no jar, no jealousy, no envy there; their best joy is in being kind to one another."<sup>8</sup> This is one of the lovely lessons which Wordsworth has taught us. Nature was much to him, and his intimate knowledge and love of her informs every line he wrote, but he cared still more for Nature in relation to man: not only as he says himself, was

<sup>7</sup> Professor Knight, *English Lake District*, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> *Theology in English Poets*, p. 107.

“the mind of man

The haunt and the main region of my song,”

but he cared little for Nature apart from man, and it was man chiefly in fellowship with his brother-man that he cared for most—humanity, in fact, in its relationship with Nature. “He not only desired to bring humanity into vital contact with the sunshine of the broad world, and to

“Feed it ’mid Nature’s old felicities,”

but he saw that human life finds its deepest interpretation in direct relation to Nature. Thus Nature reveals man, while man mirrors Nature.”<sup>9</sup>

I can only mention a few of the other lessons he teaches. His intellectual insight is intimately correlated with his moral fervour and exaltation, and the moral tone of his poetry is as elevated as it is unimpeachable, and it is, indeed, a question whether he ranked higher as a poet or as a moralist. Beyond all he teaches us simplicity and earnestness in life, character, and thought; and that, in devout communion with Nature we find a never-failing source of joy and enlightenment, an invariable source of comfort and solace amid the worries and perplexities of life.

With regard to his influence on English poetry it may safely be said that of all the poets that have appeared in England since Wordsworth’s poetic career began—Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and others—there is not one that does not owe something to his influence and example; and he and Coleridge, perhaps equally, each in his own way, have had a wider effect upon the minds and thought of their suc-

<sup>9</sup> PROFESSOR Knight, *opus cit.*

cessors than any men of the last century. "They were not so much the teachers of the people as the teachers of those men that taught the people. Their great thoughts have filtered down, gladdening, purifying, and rendering fertile the minds of many men. Without Wordsworth we should never have had Dr. Arnold as a teacher, nor Tennyson as a poet, at least their language and modes of thought must have been different."<sup>10</sup>

Among the poets who have helped to cultivate delight in the observation of natural appearances there is none that deserves to be ranked before Wordsworth, his extreme sensibility to, and accurate knowledge of the ever-changing and protean phenomena of external nature being unsurpassed. Moreover, he re-introduced into English poetry the descriptive power which had lain dormant for nearly two centuries. Apart from the intellectual vigour which he also re-introduced, he elevated the moral tone of poetry by the peculiarly placid, religious contemplativeness which characterised his writings, and this blending of robust intelligence with exalted moral fervour and meditative calm, has caused him to be known as the "English Philosophical Poet." His narratives of humble country life are full of pathos, and in these he has, perhaps, never been equalled, while the admirable appropriateness and purity of his style—his facile and faultless command over every element of language have not only enriched our literature but left a splendid example to his successors for all time.

In sonnet writing he very nearly approaches

<sup>10</sup> *Essays on English Writers*, p. 329.



Milton, and, indeed, his sonnets are among the choicest and best in our literature. By these alone his name will ever be indelibly engraved in the history of English poetry.

It will thus be seen that while Wordsworth brought the vision of a seer to bear upon the mysterious soul which he recognised in even the lowliest and commonest objects in Nature, he also interpreted the power and purpose of their teaching as an inspired priest of humanity. His marvellous concentration of intellect, the majesty of his spirit, and the pathos and purity of his life, thought, character, and language enabled him to interpret the myriad voices of Nature, and to give them expression as he alone could do; and the influence which he thus exercised upon the poetical literature of England will be as enduring as the "everlasting hills" which surrounded his beautiful and peaceful dwelling-place.

In exactly the same spirit Coleridge and Southey learnt from their master and taught the same ennobling lessons. "Without Coleridge we should not have known that school of reverential philosophy which, while it has kept pace with science and discovery, has yet preserved the noblest and sweetest faith in the world, to which the world owes all its good, pure and intact. These are great gains, and the men who gave them to us are great men."<sup>11</sup>

Well, indeed, might the "gentle Elia" apostrophise his illustrious friend as "Logician, Metaphysician, Bard," for he was assuredly all this. The subtle and far-seeing spirit of his philosophy was in no slight

<sup>11</sup> *Essays on English Writers* (1869), p. 329.



degree infused into his poetry, and his metaphysical speculations thrill with the exquisiteness of sentiment, and are permeated with the iridescent hues of fancy and imagination.

If for no other reason our country owes him a debt of gratitude, inasmuch as he has done more than any other English writer to make Shakespeare understood in a spirit of love and reverence.

The vividness of imagination, the subtlety of thought, and the unrivalled soul of music which characterised Coleridge, breathed an ethereal vitality into English poetry, which every poet since his time has recognised and sought to make his own.

The weird mysteriousness and glowing language of Southey have helped to sustain and perpetuate the vigour, the vividity, and the harmoniousness of English verse. "The magnificent creations of his poetry—piled up like clouds at sunset in the calm serenity of his capacious intellect—have always been duly appreciated by poetical students and critical readers"; yet they were too scholarly; the sublimity of his natural descriptions was too gorgeous and florid for them to become popular; but, as he was a co-worker and co-thinker with Wordsworth and Coleridge, our literature would be poorer without them, and would not willingly let them die. Moreover, his youthful ballads were extremely popular and are still highly esteemed. Beyond all this his style as a prose writer is the best the age can produce, and he has no rival.

But I must reluctantly conclude.

These three great men, residing in the same district, actuated by the same noble motives and high

resolves, and each, in his own way, divinely inspired to benefit humanity by his teaching, have in no small measure contributed to place and secure our national poetry in its present high position. They found our English Muse, who erst had occupied an imperial throne, and the altar of a high priestess, wandering unrecognised, unprotected, unappreciated among the highways and byeways, her intellect weakened, her spirit subdued, her body languishing, her raiment besmirched, and her feet bleeding; her crown and sceptre had long disappeared, and in their stead she wore upon her tattered robe the meretricious gew-gaws of a degenerate age. These great and good men so found her, and led her gently back beneath the star of Hope to the vast temple of Nature. Here they breathed into her new life and renewed energy; they clothed her afresh with the majesty of genius, put a crown upon her head, and a sceptre in her hand, and placed her upon a throne beside the high altar, where she still reigns, and rules, and serves, the glory of our country, the envy of the world!

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## GOG AND MAGOG.

BY WILLIAM KNIGHTON, ESQ., LL.D.

*Vice-President R.S.L.*


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A FORMER paper of mine was on the "Sporting Literature of ancient Greece and Rome," and, coming like the present lecture on Derby day, it did not seem out of place. Since then it seems to be anticipated that all my papers and lectures are to partake of a sporting character, at least that is the inference I draw from three of them being fixed for Derby days.

My subject to-day however is dry, and some persons may even doubt whether it has any connection with literature. I hope, however, to be enabled to convince you of the contrary. In the Bible, Ezekiel mentions Gog as a king, with Magog as his people, a rebellious people, and in the Revelations Gog and Magog are referred to as the unbelievers, and as in league with Anti-Christ and Satan.

It is, however, not in reference to these that I am about to speak, but of the Gog and Magog whose images adorn the Guildhall. These giants evidently

are derived from the mythical exaggerations which prevailed in the Low Countries in the Middle Ages, and these exaggerations and the wildness of imagination which characterise them, must have been the result of the teaching coming to all Europe from the East.

There is no limit to the wildness of imagination and gross exaggeration constantly found in connection with Eastern stories. You are all familiar with the *'Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, but they are moderate in comparison with the legendary stories in Brahminical, Buddhistic, and Talmudic literature.

As an example from Brahminical literature, mention is made of a mountain, Maha Meru by name, stated to be in the centre of the world. Its height is 137,428 yojanas. Now each yojana is sixteen miles long, and if we multiply 137,428 by sixteen we get a very respectable height for this mountain. We are told too that a stone falling from the top of it to the ground below, would take four months, fifteen days, seventeen hours to reach the earth. This is a mild example of what the Brahmins can do in the way of mythical exaggeration and wild imagination. The Dambu tree, which flourished on this mountain, was said to measure over 4,800 miles in circumference. Now I have been to America, and seen what are supposed to be the largest trees in the world, and one of them, which we measured, was 107 feet round, three feet from the ground, but these are mere trifles compared with the Brahminical Dambu trees. Rahu and Ketu are mentioned as giants, or Asurs, dwelling on this mountain, and Rahu as making periodical

attacks on the sun, while Ketu makes periodical attacks on the moon, and we are given to understand that sun and moon would be respectively devoured did not some friendly deities stand in the way. These attempts of Rahu and Ketu account for eclipses.

Each one of Brahma's days comprises 4,320 millions of our years, and 360 of these form a cycle of activity, with a similar cycle of inactivity or state of coma, in which he leaves things to get into a state of chaos, that is to say, each cycle consists of about 300 billions of our years. That will give you some idea of the extraordinary wildness and gross exaggeration of the imagination of the Brahminical writers.

Now for the Buddhists. We are told by Mahindo, one of their historians, that a king and his people were offenders against the laws, and the punishment that was inflicted upon them was that one of the greater deities took hold of the trees on the top of an adjacent mountain, pulled them up from the earth, by the roots, and shook them over the heads of the offending people in order to frighten them, all the rocks and stones falling on them. This is another instance of wild imagination, but the Talmud goes far beyond this.

When Og, the King of Bashan, heard that the Israelites were coming towards his territory, he inquired what space their encampment covered on the ground, and, on being informed that it was three square miles, he went up into the neighbouring mountain and selected a stone of that size, carrying it down on his head and hands to hurl it upon them and destroy them. He was not allowed to do this,

however. The Almighty interfered. The stone became softened, and gave way in the centre, falling over his shoulders and forming a kind of extensive necklace. As he came along, Moses, who is described as having been ten cubits high, having taken an axe ten cubits long, made a leap ten cubits high, and wounded Og above the heel, so that he fell; his neck was broken by the fall, and by the weight of the stone, and so he died. This was the sort of story in which Eastern imagination runs riot. Maimonedes in his *Digest of Rabbinical Law* quotes this from the Talmud.

Even in later Christian times there are not wanting traditions of giants and their exploits. St. Christopher, for instance, we are told, was twelve cubits high, was converted by a hermit from heathendom, and induced to take up his position near a stream in which a large number of people had lost their lives, in attempting to cross. He bore the wayfarers across. This was his occupation after conversion. One night he heard a child's voice calling to him. He got up and took the child across the stream, but, as he went along, the stream became deeper and deeper, and the child heavier and heavier, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he got to the other side. "Oh child!" he exclaimed, "you weighed me down almost with the weight of the world." "That can be no matter for surprise," said the child, "for I am the maker of the world." Hence the name Christopher, or Christ-bearer.

Thus have similar legends come down to us, though they have become modified and less gross and extravagant in character in Christian times.



In the old cities of the Low Countries we find traces of a struggle, continued for many years, between the mercantile spirit, on the one hand, and the old feudal system on the other. This struggle was one in which there were many martyrs and much shedding of blood. Ultimately the mercantile spirit prevailed. The merchants erected Guildhalls, rivalling in splendour the palaces of the Kings, and their civic processions rivalled the processions of the kings and nobles, while the trade that they established brought in riches to these towns much greater than the wealth accruing from the feudal system of rapine and oppression.

Modern commerce owes an eternal debt of gratitude, for its very existence, to the determined resistance of the traders of the Middle Ages to an effete and destructive feudalism. The true history of trade is the history of modern civilization. The civic heroes of the Low Countries ultimately triumphed, and established on a firm basis the rights of the commercial community. In their popular displays we find the origin of our ancient civic observances, copied from those of Antwerp, Douai, Lille, Malines, and Brussels even to the minutest particulars. And so we are brought to the history of Gog and Magog, our Guildhall giants.

Mixed up with these struggles there was a large amount of legend connected with giants. At Antwerp, Grapheus, the town clerk, about 1550, wrote an interesting book, giving an account of the patron giant of that city, who was called Antigonus. There is a statue of him forty feet high, which is still preserved in Antwerp, and was inspected by Queen



Victoria on the occasion of her visit to that town in 1843. The legend is as follows :—Antigonus was a great benefactor to Antwerp, but, relying on his impregnable castle, he played the tyrant, exacting toll from inoffensive travellers by violence. Those who could not pay he did not let go without cutting off one of their hands. In the civic processions which were arranged to celebrate this giant's exploits, there were a certain number of figures to represent those whose hands had been cut off. This legend is not less worthy of credence than the stories of the ancients about their deities.

Antwerp is not the only town with legends of a giant. At Douai, for instance, there was a whole family of giants. Gayant—the giant—was the name of the giant himself, and his wife was Marie Cagenon, Jacquot the giant's son, and Mademoiselle Filion was his daughter. There was an infant also, called Bimbin. Their images varied in height from twenty-two to eight feet, and were dragged in procession during the civic festivals of the town. The same thing obtained in the towns of Malines, Dunkerque, Lille, &c. All these giants were, of course, the terror of the young people, though they were supposed at one time or another to have saved their respective towns.

Sir John Mandeville, who travelled through Asia between the years 1352 and 1356, thus describes a region near the Caspian Sea :—

“In that same regioun ben the mountaynes of Caspyn, that men clepen Uber in that countree. Between the mountaynes the Iewes of ten lynages ben enclosed, that men clepen Gothe and Magothe, and they mowe not gon out on no syde. There

weren enclosed 22 Kynges, with thire people, that dwellen between the mountaynes of Scythe. There King Alisandre chacede them between the mountaynes, and there he thought for to enclose them between thorghe the work of his men. But when he saw that he might not dou it, ne bringe it to an ende, he preyed to the God of Nature, that he wolde perform that that he had begonne. And all were it so that altho he was a Paynim, and not worthy to ben heard, zit God of his mercy closed the mountaynes togyther, so that they dwellen there all fast ylokken and enclosed with high mountaynes all about, saf only on one syde, and that is the syde of Caspyn See."

It was a prevalent tradition amongst the Tartars that the people of Jayiounge and Majiounge, the Gothes and Magothes of Mandeville, were constantly trying to make a passage through this wall fortress, but without success. Both the Caliph Al Amin, and Peter the Great, of Russia, inspected the remains of this wall, which was built of petrified earth, sand, and shells. Several of the adjacent towns and villages are said to have been built out of the materials used in the construction of this wall.

Here, you see, we have the names of Gog and Magog brought into prominence by Mandeville, and evidently derived from Arabic traditions. The name he gives of Gothe and Magothe correspond with our Gog and Magog, and the wall of which he speaks was built between the Caspian and the Black Sea. It was supposed to shut out the Scythians, just as the wall built between the Solway and the Tyne, by

Agricola, on the north of England, was supposed to keep out marauders from the north.

It was not only in London that these figures of giants were brought forward in the civic processions of our own country, for we meet with them also in Chester, Salisbury, Coventry, &c. On festive occasions they were carried in procession, and they became the terror of the young people. This terror was made use of by the masters to keep unruly apprentices in order. People *believed* in them in those days, and, when the master threatened his apprentices “by Gog and Magog,” it was enough to reduce the most unruly to obedience. There are several books in which the history of these giants is set forth, as for example a work in two volumes entitled *The Gigantick History of the two famous giants at Guildhall*, by Thomas Boreman, at the “Boot and Crown,” Ludgate Hill, 1741. These volumes, so far as I know, can only be seen in the British Museum—a curiosity in their way—bound in boards, covered with old Dutch paper, and having a green raised pattern on a gold ground. This is the only work with which I am acquainted that gives the full legendary history of these two fabulous giants. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in 1150, introduced them into his History of England (*Britanniæ utriusque Regum et Principum origo et gesta*), giving a wonderful account of their prowess and exploits. As he was a bishop he did not probably narrate this story as a joke. He must have imagined that they had really existed, though he could scarcely fail to be impressed by the conviction that imagination had a large share in the history.

In one or two of the old narratives mention is

made of bones having been discovered, which must have belonged to giants, living at about the same time as Gog and Magog. These presumably were fossil bones of extinct animals.

Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions that Diocletian had thirty-three daughters. This Diocletian was not the Roman Emperor of that name, but an Asiatic monarch, who flourished at about the time "when Eli and Samuel judged in Israel." Diocletian provided these thirty-three daughters with thirty-three husbands, but they were all discontented with their husbands, and determined to put an end to them. At an opportune moment they assassinated the whole thirty and three. Diocletian was not pleased with his daughters' conduct, and, by way of punishment, he put them on a vessel with six months' provisions, and set them afloat. They set sail through the Mediterranean, to the Island of Albion, though whether this name was derived from the name of one of the daughters, or one of their sons, or, from the white colour of the rocks, is a matter of doubt. There were giants in those days, and we hear of Brute or Brutus, one of the heroes from Troy, and his brother, Corineus, amongst them. Brute or Brutus, having killed his father accidentally, fled with a host by sea, and arrived in Britain. There he had to encounter the giants, who had taken possession of the country, the descendants of the daughters of Diocletian. Great battles were fought, the giants were destroyed, but two of them were taken prisoners, Gog and Magog, and carried in triumph to the new town of London. There they were chained on each side of the palace gate, as porters. That is one legend.

Another says, that one of the giants who fought against Brutus was Gogmagog, a name which is still preserved among the hills of Cambridgeshire. This Gogmagog was one who had inflicted great loss and destruction upon the hosts of Brutus. Among his chief officers was his brother, Corineus, who was very anxious to try his prowess in single combat with Gogmagog. They passed one day through a country in which all was ravaged and destroyed, and the king asked why it was that all was thus destroyed. He was told that it was done by a ferocious giant Gogmagog. This giant measured twelve cubits in height. When Corineus at length succeeded in meeting him, in single combat, Gogmagog seized the Trojan with so mighty a grip that he succeeded in breaking three of his ribs. This made Corineus angry, so he promptly grasped his enemy round the waist, and, going on to the nearest rock, he hurled him over, and Gogmagog fell into the sea, and the mountain on which this feat was performed has preserved the name ever since, we are told, although from the description it would appear the combat took place in the neighbourhood of the modern Plymouth.

Corineus evidently comes in with some propriety as a Trojan or Roman hero, because, if you look at the figures, you will see that the one is clothed more in the Roman manner, with spear and shield, while the other has bows and arrows and a club, like an ancient Briton. The latter represents the ancient Celtic race and the former the conquering Roman, both being supposed to be giants. Their figures are about fourteen feet high.

The original wicker-work statues were burned in the Great Fire of London in 1660 and were replaced in 1669 by similar effigies. Captain Saunders, in 1707, was ordered by the Corporation to put up much more substantial ones of wood. His account for making them has been discovered and preserved. It came to £70, a considerable sum in those days.

The last time the giants appeared in a pageant was in 1730. Their origin was evidently the result of the impression spread abroad in the Low Countries that there had been a race of giants that had rendered incalculable services to towns in the struggles with savage or feudal enemies. There are several circumstances mentioned in the literature of the period which confirmed these ideas that there had been giants; for instance there was King Arthur's "chyn-bone," said to have been discovered at Glastonbury, and stated to be "longer by three inches than the legge and knee of the largest man then found." The grave of one Sir Gawain, of the Knights of the Round Table, was reported to be more than fourteen feet in length. Guy of Warwick was also a reputed giant, whose breast plate, as shown in the castle at Warwick, weighs fifty-two pounds. Of course you might suggest that it was the crupper of a horse—defensive armour of the sixteenth century—but that view would not find favour at Warwick. There is also his porridge-pot, capable of holding 102 gallons, probably a camp kettle, but it would not do to suggest that. We are told by Stowe of a gigantic tooth and shank-bone discovered at the church of St. Lawrence in the Old Bailey. The tooth was about the size of a man's fist, and the shank-bone measured



twenty-five inches. The tooth, he says, was long since removed from that place, but the shank-bone remained attached by a chain to a beam. He thinks that the tooth might have been the tooth of some monster fish, and the shank-bone that of a large animal, as, for instance, an elephant. In Caxton's *Chronicle of England* these stories are reproduced, and they are related just as if they were all true. Similarly in the history of the Trojan wars we have them recapitulated, with the story of Brute or Brutus coming into this country, and fighting against the gigantic descendants of the daughters of Diocletian. See *The History of the Trojan Wars, and Troy's Destruction* printed for Sarah Bates, at the *Sun and Bible*, Giltspur Street, London; and for James Hodges at the *Looking Glass*, on London Bridge, 1735.

The history of Fulke Fitzwarren, an outlawed Baron, in the time of King John, is full of legendary lore of the giants Gog and Magog, and of evil spirits. We are told that the difficulties that had to be encountered on the borders of Wales resulted from the evil spirits left there by the giants, who resisted all improvement. William the Conqueror, it is said, paid a visit to the neighbourhood, and enquired into the cause of the barrenness of the land, and the ruined appearance of the towns. He was told that the region was inhabited only by a race of giants of whom, in former times, Gothe and Magothe only remained alive, and that since that time no one had inhabited these parts. A courageous knight swore to combat the demons, and conquered by the Cross and his good sword.

In Fox's *Acts and Monuments* we have a reference to the same, with strong condemnation of



the pageantry of giants. When Philip and Mary made their public entry in 1554 the two images of Gogmagog and Corineus were exhibited. Fox says the history of the giants was represented all over the town at night, as if that history was an article of Holy Writ. When Queen Elizabeth passed through the town subsequently, the giants were exhibited, in great splendour, at Temple Bar.

In 1661 George Wither, the city poet, wrote on the subject of the giants, and composed a "Discourse between the two dead giants" in which there was supposed to be a great deal of fun and humour, but it was of a character that would hardly commend itself at the present day, consisting chiefly of scurrilous attacks upon female virtue. A Latin poem appeared in 1667, under the title of *Londinii quod reliquium*, in which the whole story of Gogmagog and Corineus is recapitulated in execrable verse. Finally Harrison Ainsworth, in his *Tower of London*, mentions Og, Gog, and Magog as gigantic sons of Henry the Eighth, on guard at the Tower, but as Mr. Froude, in making Henry a hero, does not mention these sons, we may conclude that they were the offspring of a novelist's unbridled imagination, and may be consigned to oblivion.

That there was a serious belief in the existence of these giants may be inferred, not only from such histories as those of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but from the use made of their names in bringing unruly apprentices and children to order. We have outlived these beliefs, but we still have our prejudices and superstitions, instilled into us in early life. They grow with our growth, and gain strength with our

increase in strength. It should be our object to get rid of them. I have known persons, for instance, to notice some minor examples, during a violent thunderstorm, go into a cupboard or closet to get protection from it ! while others will not sit thirteen to table, lest something terrible should happen to one of them. Others again will not walk under a ladder, for fear their doing so should bring mischief in its train. These are minor absurdities which still prevail. We have graver and more pernicious superstitions also amongst us, and it should be our object to abolish them and root them out, as far as we can. So far as our influence goes it will be healthily exercised, if we employ it in getting rid of such remnants of a superstitious past. I may conclude, I think, that we shall thus aid in establishing the truth of the noble lines of the poet, that,

“ Through the ages one increasing purpose runs  
And the thoughts of men are widened  
With the process of the suns.”

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